the weekly
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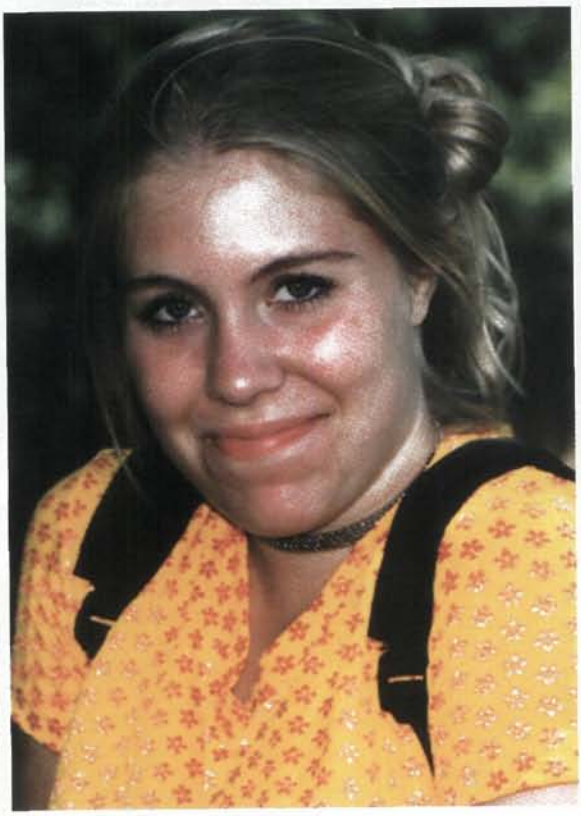
"Do you believe in God?"



Cassie Bernall, 1981-1999

"Yes."

MATT LABASH reports from Littleton, Colorado, on the life and death of Cassie Bernall

ALSO...THE RESPONSE TO LITTLETON
William Kristol • Fred Barnes
J. Bottum • Andrew Ferguson

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VOLUME 4, NUMBER 32 • MAY 10, 1999

2 SCRAPBOOK

4 CORRESPONDENCE

6 CASUAL
Ian Slatter loves it in the colonies.

7 EDITORIALS
Good and Evil in Littleton
GOPeaceniks

10 THE POLS RESPOND
After Littleton, the GOP scrambles. *by* **Andrew Ferguson**

12 A MARTYR IS BORN
Will Cassie Bernall spark an awakening? *by* **J. Bottum**

14 BORN-AGAIN GORE
The veep dusts off his Bible. *by* **Fred Barnes**

16 MODERATES FOR ALL SEASONS
The Ripon Society has lots of nice people. *by* **David Brooks**

40 PARODY
A pundette in *Playboy*.

20 THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CASSIE BERNALL
"Do you believe in God?" "Yes." *by* **Matt Labash**

26 ELECTING THE SUPREME COURT
A win in 2000 means control of the judiciary. *by* **Daniel E. Troy**

Books & Arts

31 THE ART OF ART COLLECTING A new biography of Etta and Claribel Cone. *by* **Libby Sternberg**

33 GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE The computer as Hollywood villain. *by* **J. Bottum & Jonathan V. Last**

35 SCHOOL'S OUT Two new books make the case for competition in education. *by* **Myron Lieberman**

36 BAD WRITING Judith Butler did it. *by* **D. G. Myers**

William Kristol, *Editor and Publisher* **Fred Barnes,** *Executive Editor*
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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Guess Who's Not Coming to Lunch

No one has done more to roll back affirmative action than Ward Connerly of California, author of that state's successful Proposition 209. In the past several months, at least three Republican presidential contenders—Steve Forbes, Dan Quayle, and Lamar Alexander—called to set up meetings with Connerly to discuss their positions on affirmative action. Connerly happily met with all three. "Every one of them," Connerly says, "made it clear he endorsed my position." In return, Connerly made something clear to Forbes, Quayle, and Alexander: "I am leaning toward George Bush," Connerly told them straightforwardly. "I think the world of him."

George W. Bush, the Republican front-runner, professes to feel the same way about Ward Connerly. At one point, Bush told Connerly he couldn't wait till the two of them could get together over lunch and talk about affirmative action. Except, as it turns out, Bush *could* wait. And has been waiting. "My staff has been calling his staff for six weeks now, trying to arrange a meeting," Connerly says. "All I can tell you is that a meeting has not been arranged. His staff certainly knows where I am."

So far, Connerly has done his best to see the apparent snub in the best possible light. "I really don't know if he's putting me off or not," Connerly says. "He said he wanted to meet with me. All I know is that if I were in his position and I wanted to meet with somebody, my staff had better work it out." Still, after six weeks, even the gentlemanly Connerly clearly is struggling not to take Bush's "scheduling conflicts" personally. "I'm a very loyal Republican who is not out there on the fringes," he says. "I'm an establishment kind of guy: I believe the governor when he says he's against quotas and preferences and set-asides and guaranteed outcomes. And if that be true, it seems to me the logical extension of all that is that he would support efforts to eliminate all of those things." Connerly doesn't seem sure what to make of Bush's elusiveness. "I'll say this, I don't want to support somebody who doesn't want my support."

Staffing Up

Ask aides to presidential campaigns how their candidate is faring and you'll get as much candor as you used to get out of the Kremlin: No matter how bad things are, they're always perfect. But the truth is out there, as they say, and it's just gotten a bit easier to find. New Hampshire political consultant Chip Griffin has provided the invaluable service of culling Federal Election Commission reports to compile a list of all the people on the payroll of each presidential candidate; he's put them all on his Web site, www.griffinsg.com, and, more important, included the estimated annual salaries of these people (extrapolated from the most recent FEC reports).

So how do things look? Al Gore has the biggest staff, topping out at 64 (Bill Bradley has a more modest 33). The Republican numbers are as follows: Dan Quayle 37, Gary Bauer 26, George W. Bush 25, Lamar Alexander 24, John McCain 16, Pat Buchanan 11, Bob Smith 7, and Elizabeth Dole, just 4.

As for John Kasich, he didn't file a report with the FEC. And Steve Forbes didn't include the names or the salaries of any of his staffers. That's too bad. Some of the mid-level staffers on the Forbes campaign have been talking about their six-figure compensation. We look forward to finding out if they're telling the truth. As for the highest-paid staffers, one stands out from all the others: Mark Tipps, Lamar Alexander's campaign manager, appears to be making $156,058. And that's *after* taxes. Only five other campaign staffers have take-home pay exceeding $100,000, and, interestingly, none of them works for Bush.

She, At Least, Hasn't Gone Wobbly

In striking contrast to the pusillanimous Congress, Margaret Thatcher proved on April 20 that she is an Iron Lady for all seasons. Her remarks on Kosovo in an address marking the 20th anniversary of her first election as Britain's prime minister were tough, well reasoned, and eloquent. Some excerpts:

"Last September I went to Vukovar, a city destroyed and its inhabitants butchered by the soldiers of Slobodan Milosevic. The place still smells of death, the windows weep, and the ruins gape. Around Srebrenica, where neither I nor many other Westerners have gone, the bodies

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of thousands of slaughtered victims still lie in unmarked graves. In Kosovo, we can only imagine what depravities of human wickedness, what depths of human degradation, those endless columns of refugees have fled. Mass rape, mass graves, death camps, historic communities wiped out by ethnic cleansing—these are the monuments to Milosevic's triumphs.

"They are also, let's remember and admit, the result of eight long years of Western weakness. When will they ever learn? . . .

"For eight years I have called for Serbia to be stopped. Even after the massacre of Srebrenica I was told that my calls for military action were mere 'emotional nonsense,' words which, I think, only a man could have uttered.

"But there were also good reasons for taking action early. The West could have stopped Milosevic in Slovenia or Croatia in 1991, or in Bosnia in 1992. But instead we deprived his opponents of the means to arm themselves, thus allowing his aggression to prosper.

"Even in 1995, when at last a combination of airstrikes and well-armed Croat and Muslim ground forces broke the power of the Bosnian-Serb aggressors, we intervened to halt their advance onto Banja Luka, and so avoid anything that might threaten Milosevic. Even then, Western political leaders believed that the butcher of Belgrade could be a force for stability. So here we are now, fighting a war eight years too late, on treacherous terrain, so far without much effective local support, with imperfect intelligence, and with war aims that some find unclear and unpersuasive.

"But with all that said—and it must be said, so that the lessons are well and truly learned—let there be no doubt: This is a war that must be won. . . .

"It would be both cruel and stupid to expect the Albanian Kosovans now to return to live under any form of Serbian rule. Kosovo must be given independence, initially under international protection. And there must be no partition, a plan that predictable siren voices are already advancing. Partition would only serve to reward violence and ethnic cleansing. It would be to concede defeat. And I am unmoved by Serb pleas to retain their grasp on most of Kosovo because it contains their holy places. Coming from those who systematically leveled Catholic churches and Muslim mosques wherever they went, such an argument is cynical almost to the point of blasphemy. . . .

"The goal of war is victory. And the only victory worth having now is one that prevents Serbia ever again having the means to attack its neighbors and terrorize its non-Serb inhabitants. That will require the destruction of Serbia's political will, the destruction of its war machine and all the infrastructure on which these depend. We must be prepared to cope with all the changing demands of war—including, if that is what is required, the deployment of ground troops. And we must expect a long haul until the job is done."

William Milhous Clinton?

According to a fascinating account in the *New York Times* last week, Clinton administration officials claim their boss could successfully spin a "compromise" on Kosovo: "'Clinton is a better communicator than anyone else,' said a senior Administration official. 'Once Clinton decides that's what he's going to do, he'll sell it. If Nixon could sell the fall of Saigon as peace with honor, Clinton can sell this.'"

Let's see now . . . Saigon fell in April 1975, eight months after Nixon's resignation. Does this "senior administration official" know something that we don't?

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No Controlling National Interest

After a long lead-in, William Kristol and Robert Kagan say that there are profound national interests at stake in Kosovo ("The National Interest," April 26). Tellingly, they start with NATO credibility. That is specific enough, but it is clearly a derivative concern emanating from the fact that engagement has already begun. As to whether there was a per se national interest to begin with, they get fuzzy in offering the "question of the kind of world we want . . . in strategically vital parts." Would the kind of world we want in strategically vital parts include China? Should we initiate bombing there to snuff out that country's barbarity toward some of its citizens? Surely there's more to determining national interest than the "question" offered by the editors.

WILLIAM M. WEISS
FLUSHING, OH

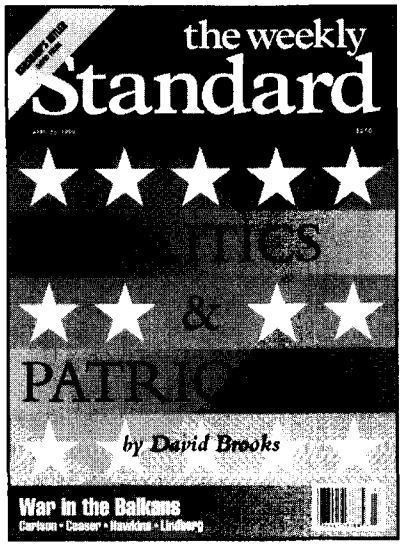
William Kristol and Robert Kagan's strident support for further U.S. involvement in the Balkans' latest civil war absolutely amazes me. This bloodbath has two villains: Milosevic and Clinton. We have absolutely no business being in Serbia or Kosovo. It is a European problem best handled by Europeans. Clinton certainly does not have the moral authority to preach to anyone about right and wrong, much less lead a "holy" crusade. We should get out of this mess now before it is too late and body bags start piling up.

JAMES R. BREESE
ROCHESTER, NY

Caring for Kids

Robert Goldberg certainly deserves credit for being consistent ("Wag the Kids," April 5/April 12). His problem, however, is that he is consistently wrong. Nearly two years ago Goldberg said there was no children's health insurance crisis. Now he again makes the same contention. Of course, to deny there is a crisis Goldberg has to deny the facts on the number of uninsured children there are in America. In 1995 the U.S. Bureau of the Census estimated that 10 million children ages 0-17 were uninsured throughout the year. If you add uninsured children through age 18, the number grows by more than 500,000. Further (again according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census), data for the period between 1993 and 1995 show that as many as 23 million children went without health insurance coverage for at least one month and at least 15 million of those children went without health insurance for six months or more.

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), which gives grants to states to make health insurance affordable for children in working families, was passed with considerable leadership by Republicans like Senators Orrin Hatch and John



Chafee and Rep. Nancy Johnson. Anticipating being on the losing side of the argument, Goldberg simply decided that "when it comes to children, it seems all politicians are liberals."

Goldberg attacks CHIP as an entitlement and would have any unwitting reader believe that it is an entitlement for every eligible child similar to the guarantees senior citizens enjoy through Social Security or Medicare. Congress could not have been clearer when it drafted CHIP and explicitly stated it was not creating an entitlement program for individuals. In fact, what Congress entitles is states—to funding under the program—with no entitlement to coverage for any of America's uninsured children.

Goldberg would also have us believe that insuring children won't make them healthier. But this isn't the first time he has made such a bizarre claim. He has been against the Vaccines for Children program for years, despite its having helped this nation reach the highest immunization levels for youngsters in the history of the nation. With increased immunization rates we are also enjoying reduced incidence of immunization-preventable diseases. The families that have enrolled their children in CHIP and have received eyeglasses, hearing aides, well-baby visits, prescriptions, and other medical services would most certainly tell Goldberg, the Congress, and the American taxpayers that their children are better off with the program than without it.

Goldberg says that outreach efforts to enroll uninsured children in CHIP are politically motivated by a vice president anxious to tout a presidential run. The fact is, most of the governors in the 48 states that have adopted CHIPs (30 of them are Republican—some with national aspirations of their own to tout) are engaged in or are preparing CHIP outreach campaigns to insure children.

Goldberg says "there never was a real children's health crisis, just a political benefit from talking about one." The fact is that the Congress, the governors, the state legislatures, and the American public believe not only that there is a crisis, but that CHIP is a meaningful solution to the crisis, and are working tirelessly to implement it for the benefit of America's children.

MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN
PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER
CHILDREN'S DEFENSE FUND
WASHINGTON, DC

Robert Goldberg's view of how children are faring in the nation's health-care system is misguided and misinformed, especially when it comes to uninsured youth and the value of the Kidcare program.

According to statistics from the American Academy of Pediatrics, 11 million children in the United States are uninsured. This figure is based on information from the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Three million of these children can benefit from the Kidcare program.

Goldberg mistakenly asserts that

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uninsured children are healthier. In fact, last year's study by the National Research Council determined that uninsured children have many unmet health needs. They are more likely to be sick as newborns, less likely to be immunized as preschoolers, and less likely to receive medical treatment for injuries and illnesses such as asthma, ear infections, and tooth decay.

Finally, Goldberg claims that 97 percent of children in low-income families are able to obtain health-care services. What he fails to mention is that many of those services are provided in hospital emergency rooms. The costs for those visits are covered by insured Americans, through higher premiums and out-of-pocket charges. It would simply make more sense to offer children preventive care at much less expense.

Health insurance offers children regular care, and Kidcare provides that opportunity for several million children. It is a program that deserves public support for its ability to provide the services children need, when they need them, at a lower cost to us all.

RICK BUCCIARELLI
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS
WASHINGTON, DC

WAGNER'S REICH CYCLE

In defending his musical icon, Michael Linton painted a dangerously erroneous picture of 19th-century composer and polemicist Richard Wagner ("Tone-Deaf," April 19).

His charge that Wagner's racial views have become a lucrative cottage industry for a number of academics ignores both history and the firsthand testimony of Holocaust survivors, who bore witness to the influence of Wagner's anti-Semitic polemics and operas on leaders of the Third Reich. This is the very testimony we should be seeking out for a more comprehensive understanding of the rise of Nazism and the origins of the Holocaust in a nation that only half a century earlier had granted full equality to the Jews.

Even Alfred Rosenberg, Hitler's personal philosopher and the Nazi party's chief propagandist after Goebbels, named Wagner one of the four fountainheads of Nazi ideology. And according to William L. Shirer's *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Hitler himself said, "Whoever wants to understand National Socialist Germany must know Wagner."

Linton does admit Wagner was a racist, but with a quick sleight of hand tells us so were Liszt, Darwin, and most "liberal" scientific thinkers in the 19th century. This, however, doesn't even begin to approach the truth.

Wagner was a racist who, in his writings from 1850 to 1882, called for the death of Jews. There is absolutely no concrete evidence to smear Linton's other examples with the same brush.

EUGENE BLUM
BALTIMORE, MD

CHOOSING CAREFULLY

THE SCRAPBOOK should desist briefly from liberal bashing to specify exactly what it means by school choice, and exactly how much it wants ("The School-Choice Juggernaut," April 26).

Properly speaking, the much praised activities of Forstmann and Walton have as little to do with school choice as when wealthy families send their own children to private school. Nobody questions their right to spend their own money to fund scholarships, although liberals may question the ultimate effect of their activities on beleaguered public schools and the millions of children who will probably remain in them.

The political problem arises with taxpayer-funded support for private schools. Leaving aside the issue of whether or not vouchers are constitutional, what do conservatives want? Do they favor closing the nation's public schools and having the federal government give every family a $5,000 voucher for every child they have between the ages of 3 and 18 to be spent at the school of their choice? Should the same thing be done at the state level? Or should the public schools be left in place and the vouchers still handed out? Assuming 80 million or so children in the relevant age group, that would be about $40 billion a year in addition to current educational spending.

The honorable and morally serious part of the impetus behind the school-choice movement comes from a perception, in many ways justified, that many inner-city schools are failing the children who attend them. But how can a taxpayer-funded school-voucher program be designed to serve only children from a few localities who are almost entirely of one race? Isn't it a better approach to emphasize charter schools and other approaches (including spending money to equalize urban facilities with those in suburban jurisdictions and demanding greater accountability from teachers) which do not raise the divisive controversies vouchers will inevitably cause?

PETER CONNOLLY
WASHINGTON, DC

COMPOUND ANSWERS

Hooray for Dan Quayle and Sen. John Breaux's ideas for improving IRAs as reported by Stephen Moore ("Compounding the Solution," April 19). But how about this idea: Collect no taxes on money deposited into and, at the appropriate time, withdrawn from whatever "retirement accounts" people choose, as long as they agree to forgo Social Security benefits. That way more and more of us would invest, the economy would grow, and tax revenues eventually would expand. Meanwhile, fewer and fewer of us would draw Social Security checks, Uncle Sam could cut payroll taxes, and the seemingly ever-looming crisis would disappear. Oh, and away would go one of the Democrats' favorite cudgels for beating on Republicans.

SCOTT SCHAFER
FALLS CHURCH, VA

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Casual

Stars and Stripes Forever

I'd like to make plain at the outset that, though British by birth and upbringing, I'm avidly pro-American. And you'll have to concede I have the bona fides to prove it: an American wife. She made clear early on that, wherever the next few years might take us, a future together will eventually mean a future in her native Indiana.

So my attachment to this country must be understood to extend beyond the superficial. Which entitles me, I hope, to offer these recollections, more in fondness than dismay.

They date from my first trip to the Land of Opportunity six years ago, when I was 22. I came through a student exchange program to work at a YMCA summer camp in Ohio. Several of us foreigners—some Australians and New Zealanders and I—were brought on as counselors to broaden the kids' experience. It was a great idea.

I spent my days and nights answering all kinds of questions about my homeland. Some examples: "Do you have TVs and VCRs?" "Do you have cars?" and "Do you have burgers?" I wasn't able to figure which Fourth World country the kids were confusing Britain with. What interested many of them even more was hearing me pronounce multitudes of words in my "funny accent."

"You talk weird," in short, was the campers' general verdict. Not that I was fazed. My sponsoring agency had prepped me for the experience of being a foreigner on these shores. They'd even provided me a list of "cultural warnings": Use first names only for people who are your age or younger. . . . If you ask for help you'll get it, but make sure you ask. . . . Use of nicknames is common: An American may be Al, but he won't be Algernon. . . . Americans are jealous of their personal space and big fans of deodorant. . . . Finally, this slightly mysterious tip: Be prepared for the fact that the average American is not very geographically aware.

Along with the cultural warnings, the agency admonished: There's nothing quite like the real thing. Which was true enough. That geography alert, especially, turned out to be a decided understatement.

Of course, I never expected much from schoolkids. I didn't think they'd know anything about England, and I wasn't disappointed. But the adults did surprise me. From my collection of howlers, some precious examples:

"England—isn't that near New Zealand?" (I suspect there was some confusion with Australia.) When asked about where I'm from, I sometimes say about 40 miles east of the capital. One girl responded, "So you live near Paris?" On reflection, by American standards, I do live "near" Paris.

Americans like to think big. I asked one college student how big she thought Britain was. "About the size of the United States," was the reply. (Britain would fit neatly inside Nebraska.)

A question I've been asked more than once is, "What language do you speak in England?" (I sometimes give in to the temptation to answer, American.) A variation on the language question is, "How many languages do you speak?" (I've been known to expand my repertoire to include South African, Australian, Canadian, Irish, Scottish, and of course Maltese. When I try that with a group of college students, there's usually one who doesn't catch my drift.)

Despite encounters like these, I enjoy speaking to Americans about Britain, especially when I get the chance to dispel myths, such as the assumption that the entire country amounts to a quaint village beside a castle on a hill. The questions asked most often have to do with the monarchy and the supposedly universal custom of stopping work for afternoon tea. The answers are, respectively, No, not all people in England have personally met the queen, and, Only if you're a member of a union.

I should point out that although I've been taken aback by Americans' lack of knowledge, I'm quite forgiving. America is a great country and one that I'm willing to believe the majority of citizens *could* actually find on a map. (Though I wouldn't necessarily want to put that notion to the test.) Let's face it, knowing where Britain is falls just short of being a life-and-death issue.

Besides, some Americans *can* locate Britain, and can do it with the greatest of ease—among them my Midwestern bride.

Now that it looks like I shall be spending the rest of my life in the colonies, I find I have some boning up of my own to do. I'm working hard at my Americanization. This has involved mastering the National Anthem, becoming a Bears fan, dreaming of owning a Ford truck—and, of course, trading in "God Save the Queen" for "God Bless America."

Ian Slatter

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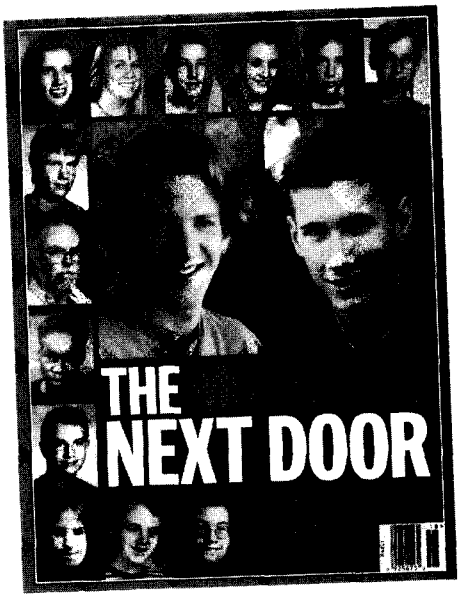
the weekly Standard

Good and Evil in Littleton

"I don't know why human beings do evil." Thus Vice President Al Gore, at last Sunday's memorial service in Littleton, Colorado. Of course, as Andrew Ferguson reports below, politicians of both parties soon abandoned such unusual honesty and humility. But as they stumped on behalf of their favorite "solutions," the speeches rang even hollower than usual.

So did much of the media analysis. Last week, the covers of both *Newsweek* and *U.S. News* asked simply, "Why?" *Time,* meanwhile, featured color photos of the killers, with this cover line: "The monsters next door. What made them do it?"



Needless to say, the newsweeklies could not answer their own questions. Evil is often inexplicable. It is also often uninteresting. The more we learned about Eric Harris's diary and Dylan Klebold's Little League, the more we were reminded that evil is often banal. And the more lessons we were given about how to prevent our children from going off the rails (*U.S. News* promised to tell us "How parents, kids, and schools can spot trouble—and head it off"), the less enlightened we felt.

So is there nothing to be done but to deplore the terrible events and move on? No. Moving on doesn't do justice to what happened in Littleton. For Littleton was not only about inexplicable evil. It was also about extraordinary good. The most humanly interesting stories from Littleton are not those of Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold. They are 17-year-old Cassie Bernall, choosing to die rather than deny her faith; 47-year-old Dave Sanders, sacrificing himself to save the lives of his students; 15-year-old Daniel Rohrbough, killed while holding an exit door open for his fleeing classmates. It is the manifestations of good, more than of evil, that make Littleton so powerful a story and so important a moment.

Why have the media given so much more attention to Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold than to Cassie Bernall and Dave Sanders? Because they can't help but assume that the actions of Harris and Klebold are somehow more solid, more *real* than those of Bernall and Sanders. The *Washington Post* referred to Cassie Bernall in its headline as a "'martyr.'" *Time,* on the other hand, felt no need to put quotation marks around its description of the two killers as monsters. For us, the monstrous is real. The noble is not.

That good can be more interesting than evil, that good can be more powerful than evil—these are hard truths for us moderns to accept. The *Chicago Tribune* had a moving editorial last week praising Cassie Bernall's deed as "a humbling and awe-inspiring" example of "true moral heroism." But the writer felt compelled to begin his editorial in this way: "Yes. No. It depends. We live in an 'it depends' kind of world and, Bill Clinton's egregious example notwithstanding, that probably isn't a bad thing. The world isn't all black and white, and absolutists—moral, political or other—tend quickly to become absolutely intolerant and intolerable."

This warning at the top of the editorial was, fortunately, forgotten by its end, when the *Tribune* praised Cassie's simple moral choice: "She could have lied—but didn't. She could have fudged or quibbled—but didn't. She simply said yes." Isn't

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that rather "black and white?" And wasn't it the "absolutely intolerant" killers who were thoroughly modern, who disbelieved in moral absolutes, who denied that any truth bound them? Eric Harris wrote: "My belief is that if I say something, it goes. I am the law. . . . Feel no remorse, no sense of shame." There you have it: the culmination, the end, of modernity.

Modernity began with Machiavelli. The great interpreter of Machiavelli, the late Leo Strauss, concluded his book on that unbelievably brilliant and subtle "teacher of evil" with the suggestion that we could only ascend from the dead-end of Machiavellian modernity by returning to an earlier notion of "the primacy of the good." Cassie Bernall and Dave Sanders, in different ways, took their bearings from the primacy of the good.

—*William Kristol*

GOP PEACENIKS

The congressional Republican party hit bottom last week. On Wednesday, April 28, a majority of Republican House members cast two deeply irresponsible votes on the U.S. military action against Yugoslavia. Most press attention focused on the vote that denied President Clinton support for the air campaign. Republicans voted six to one against the resolution, and its failure sent a terrible signal, both to American pilots who now have to continue risking their lives knowing that the Republican Congress does not support their mission, and to Slobodan Milosevic, who will undoubtedly read the vote as strong evidence that the United States lacks the will to prevail.

Less noticed, but in our view even more shocking, was the fact that 127 House Republicans—57 percent of the Republican majority—voted to invoke the War Powers Act and compel the president to withdraw all American forces from the conflict within 30 days. Not as part of any diplomatic settlement, not in return for any concessions by Milosevic, not even as part of some phony Russian-brokered deal, for which so many McGovernite Republicans are foolishly pressing. No, just cut and run. Game over. Milosevic wins, the United States and NATO lose. That is what a majority of Republicans voted for last week, and no amount of Republican support for increased defense spending—urgent as that is—can cover up the shame of that vote. Last Wednesday was a defining moment for the congressional Republican party, and Republicans defined themselves as the party of defeat.

Congressional Republicans have now miraculously transformed themselves into a simulacrum of Vietnam-era left-wing Democrats. They call for peace at any price. They fly off, Ramsey Clark-style, to negotiate with American enemies and their backers in Moscow. And they invoke the War Powers Act, which Republican presidents from Nixon to Reagan to Bush have declared an unconstitutional restraint on executive prerogative. What's next? Sit-ins? Posing for TV cameras while sitting on anti-aircraft guns in Belgrade?

A few brave Republicans, led by Senator John McCain, have tried to prevent the party from driving off this isolationist cliff. In the House, 27 Republicans, led by the redoubtable Henry Hyde, voted against invoking the War Powers Act and for the air campaign. But it seems pretty clear that for now the majority of congressional Republicans are set in their unfortunate ways.

Which leaves it up to the leading Republican presidential candidates to save the party from the ignominy into which the congressional GOP threatens to plunge it. McCain's efforts have been heroic, but he cannot accomplish this vital task alone. Right now, the odds-on favorite to win the Republican nomination is George W. Bush. Bush was not as fast off the mark as McCain in calling for victory in the Yugoslav war, but eventually he did take a firm and honorable stand. As the GOP presidential front-runner, however, and in the absence of sound congressional leadership, Bush needs to do more. He should reiterate his position that America must win this war. More important, he should repudiate last week's votes—for the sake of his party, and the nation. It isn't fun or easy to cut against the grain of one's own party. But at moments like this, that is what leaders do.

—*William Kristol and Robert Kagan, for the Editors*

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THE POLS RESPOND

by Andrew Ferguson

THE LAST THING any of us has a right to expect from politicians is a dignified silence, and this is true even in the face of a transcendent horror like the murder of schoolchildren. But the initial reaction to the Littleton shootings was unexpectedly promising. "I don't know how you stop it," said Pat Buchanan. "You can't legislate love," said George W. Bush. "The answer," said Richard Gephardt, "won't be found in state legislatures or the halls of Congress." Even the president, the talkiest politician since William Jennings Bryan and a dedicated solutionist who can find a public-policy answer to any problem, was oddly subdued. In the immediate aftermath of the murders he merely offered anodyne assurances that our schools were still safe. (At the same time, he drew the lesson that such violence "could happen anywhere," meaning presumably that our schools weren't safe. But why quibble.)

Within 72 hours he and his fellow solutionists had righted themselves. The administration issued a bull with the ominous title: "The White House at Work: President Clinton: Actions to Help Keep Our Schools Safe." Working, working, working, the president announced that the federal government would pay for the victims' funerals and compensate parents for wages lost during their absence from work; pay for an additional 600 school police officers in a mysteriously selected 336 communities; spend $180 million to "promote comprehensive school safety strategies," whatever those might be; and print up an extra 150,000 copies of the government's pamphlet *Early Warning Timely Response: A Guide to Safe Schools*. So there it was: proof that there's nothing, absolutely nothing, the president can't address with a budget appropriation, a "public-private partnership," or a Third Way, New Democrat-style initiative that avoids the twin vices of Big Government and Republican laissez faire.

Dennis Hastert

Kevin Chadwick

But this was only the beginning. By the weekend after the murders, the White House announced an event for the following Tuesday, at which the president would offer further solutions to the problem of evil. (These turned out to be a handful of gun control measures that he had proposed before Littleton.) The announcement panicked congressional Republicans, who were, as always, slower to mobilize, owing at least in part to those laissez-faire instincts that have made them infamous. Fortunately, Republican leaders had an event of their own already scheduled for that Tuesday. It was to be held at Ellen Glasgow Middle School in Alexandria, Virginia. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, House Speaker Denny Hastert, Senate President pro tempore Strom Thurmond, and other congressional Republicans were to boom their recently-passed "Ed-Flex" bill. But now the event was hastily recast, to showcase instead the Republican response to the murders at Columbine High.

And that response would be . . . well . . . not more gun control, for reasons of philosophy and finance (the National Rifle Association gives the bulk of its campaign contributions to Republicans) . . . and a National Grief Counseling Initiative might smack of social engineering . . . and any additional budget appropriations for school cops or metal detectors or whatever might break agreed-upon budget caps. Republican staffers on Capitol Hill thus labored deep into the night to formulate a response that would end-run the president—out-Clinton Clinton, as it were. And so it was that the leaders of the Republican party lumbered last Tuesday into a packed assembly hall at Glasgow Middle School and announced the National Conference on Youth and Culture.

Reporters had been forewarned of the announcement and were out with their camera crews in force. The Glasgow students made of themselves a compliant audience, row after row of them slumped on risers and dressed in their baggy T-shirts and outsized

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jeans and blocky sneakers. A dozen or so were arrayed in a semi-circle at the back of the podium, behind the speakers, as props for the cameras. They wore that cheerful, contented look of utter vacancy we have come to expect from our teenagers. The Republicans took the stage and smiled at them and the kids smiled back, waving at the photographers, clowning for their pals. The Republicans didn't seem to mind. After all, it is for them that the National Conference is going to be launched. For the children.

LOTT AND HASTERT HAVE RESPONDED TO LITTLETON WITH A PERFECT CLINTON EVENT: A SERIES OF TOWN MEETINGS ON YOUTH AND CULTURE.

Despite the last-minute reconfiguring, the event, as it turned out, was mostly about the Ed-Flex bill. The Republicans spoke in order of rank—Reps. Davis of Virginia and Castle of Delaware, then Sen. Frist of Tennessee, then Hastert and Lott—and all of them offered condolences to the community of Littleton, taking pains to note that they themselves knew a large number of children personally, had indeed fathered children of their own, and in point of fact had once been children themselves. With these bona fides established, Hastert took the microphone to announce the initiative.

"We're all aware of the situation in Colorado, and our hearts go out," Hastert said. "You know, I taught for sixteen years. My wife has taught for 33 years. So we care about kids. We care about schools. And we hope that will never happen again.

"And there's one thing we can do. Oh, we can bring in all the experts, telling us this philosophy will work or that one. But what we need to do is, we need to listen to kids. We need to listen to you. *You* know what works in education. *You* know what your needs are. And we need to take some time—all members of Congress, and I intend to do this—we need to go home and listen to you. And then to take that information and put together good legislation that will work for our kids."

The kids applauded this. For this was the announcement—however sketchy—of the National Conference on Youth and Culture. Then Lott took the mike to fill in the details.

"My mother was a teacher—her whole life," Lott said, by way of explaining why he, as majority leader of the United States Senate, felt competent to address issues of education, and why education was "issue number one in my heart." He continued: "As we look to what has happened in Colorado, as we all have to examine ourselves, ask ourselves, Have we done enough, as teachers, as parents, administrators, we need a dialogue with our children. I call here today for a National Conference on Youth and Culture. We have got to ask ourselves,

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Can we do more? And we're going to ask all our colleagues in the House and Senate to start a dialogue about this. Thank you very much."

Thus the announcement. In the days that followed, Republican aides elaborated on the plan. The National Conference on Youth and Culture will consist of a series of 12 to 18 town meetings, televised if possible, and privately financed (those damn budget caps again). Even now the speaker and majority leader are working the phones, trying to line up a roster of "leaders" from the worlds of academia, business, entertainment, and political activism to lend their names to the effort, and maybe even appear at a town meeting or two. Asked specifically what these "dialogues" would look like, one aide pointed to the appearance by President Clinton with high school children the day after the Littleton shootings—a nationally televised roundtable that won the president plaudits for his sensitivity. It was a perfect Clinton event: several hours of talking, issuing finally in nothing of any consequence. "That's the kind of thing Lott and Hastert would really like to do," the aide said.

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

A MARTYR IS BORN

by J. Bottum

ON THE ENDLESS CABLE-TV TALK SHOWS, the call-in radio programs, and the newspaper editorial pages across America, the topic since April 20 has been Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, the high-school murderers in Littleton, Colorado. The violence experts, the child psychologists, and the grief specialists have all had their turn. In an editorial from the White House, Hillary Clinton called for more government spending on therapists and counselors for our public schools: "In a world that can feel overwhelming and out of control, children need help managing their anger, resolving their conflicts, and solving their problems with words instead of weapons."

Meanwhile, from the nation's pulpits and youth prayer groups, at Bible study classes and after-church coffee klatches, across the e-mail distribution lists and the fax trees, another story has been bubbling up: the story of Cassie Bernall, the Christian martyr of Colorado, who was shot for her faith in God.

Eight of the murdered students at Columbine high school were serious Christians, four Catholics and four evangelicals. The killers went after 17-year-old Rachel Scott and 18-year-old Valeen Schnurr apparently for no other reason than that they had Bibles. The central image of Littleton, however, is that of Cassie—the 17-year-old with a gun to her head being asked if she believed in God. Strangers flew in from New York and California to be at her funeral. Young Life, the evangelical ministry that had been working in her Columbine High School, held an impromptu prayer service for her in Denver last week, and 1,500 students showed up. At an evangelical rally in Pontiac, Michigan, 73,000 teenagers wept along with sermon after sermon on her death.

You have to think about it for a moment to realize just how extraordinary this is. After the murder of 12 high-school students and one teacher—at the hands of two of their classmates, who giggled as they fired shotguns and set off pipe bombs—the topic being discussed by millions of Americans is not "How do we stop the violence in our schools?" or "How do we deal with our grief?" or "How can we make sense of this senseless tragedy?"

The topic is rather that on April 20, 1999, an

AP/Wide World Photos

Fifteen crosses, placed as a memorial on a hilltop near Columbine High School

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American girl at a suburban high school was granted what is, in Christian theology, the highest and most beautiful gift that God bestows. "Now she's in heaven. She's so much better off than any of us," one of her Bible-study friends told a reporter. "I just thank God she died that way," said another. "She's in the martyrs' hall of fame," her pastor explained at her funeral. "I am just so happy that Cassie is smiling down on us right now," added one of the parishioners who knew her. "She's in a good place."

The actual murderers, well, yes, they were monsters who'd wandered the World Wide Web plucking flowers of evil: a little racism, a little Nazism, a little Satanism, a little instruction in making pipe-bombs. But who could be interested in Harris and Klebold, American Christians seem to be asking, when we have before us proof of God's goodness with the example of Cassie Bernall? In Denver after the tragedy, a Jesuit priest quoted the 20th-century French mystic Simone Weil: "Imaginary evil is romantic and varied, full of charm; imaginary good is tiresome and flat. Real evil, however, is dreary, monotonous, barren. Real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating."

As a religious phenomenon, the elevation of Cassie Bernall is a fascinating sign of the times, an almost shocking throwback to a spirituality that many social analysts assumed had disappeared from all but a few pockets of "post-Christian" America. In a poem her brother discovered on her desk the morning after her death, Cassie wrote of her willingness to "to suffer and to die" with Christ. On a videotape she made for her youth group, she vowed that she wanted most of all to "be a good example to nonbelievers and also to Christians." It's like something from the famous account of the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity in A.D. 203, or the tales of the thousands of early Christians who went joyously to their deaths in the Roman coliseums. Richard Mouw, president of the evangelical Fuller Seminary, compares Cassie to St. Eulalia. Robin Darling Young, a patristics scholar at Catholic University, mentions Catherine of Alexandria, Crispina, and Rhipsime. The first thought of a Catholic activist in Washington is to quote John Donne, "Affliction is a treasure."

As a social phenomenon, however, the elevation of Cassie Bernall is even more revealing. For with this *anti-tragic* picture from Littleton, this *meaningful* calamity, we are so far beyond the culture wars that there may be no turning back. The reaction to it seems straight out of Jonathan Edwards's account of the Great Awakening in New England, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, which begins: "At the latter end of the year 1733, there appeared a very unusual flexibleness, and yielding to advice, in our young people."

Across America, what's being preached to parents and children alike is a change of heart. Back when she was in eighth and ninth grade, Cassie had begun to dabble in witchcraft, alcohol, and drugs, her parents told ABC's religion reporter Peggy Wehmeyer. After discovering letters describing violent acts she and her friends imagined doing to their parents, Brad and Misty Bernall enrolled their daughter in a new

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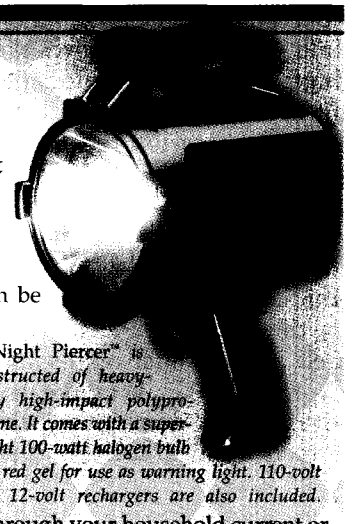

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school, sent her on an intense weekend Christian retreat, and prohibited her from leaving the house except to go to church. "It's hard," her father explained, "because you know you're taking a chance of driving your child further away from you." But one day Cassie came home, changed into a believer: "It's like she was in a dark room and somebody turned the light on, and she saw the beauty that was surrounding her."

A signal that the old categories of the culture wars no longer fit may be the fact that Cassie Bernall's story has been fairly well covered by a media often denounced by religious conservatives for anti-Christian bias. Barbara Bradley related on National Public Radio the details of Cassie's death in the first days after the murders. Peggy Wehmeyer reported the story repeatedly on ABC's evening news. The *Washington Post* carried Cassie's story on consecutive days, as did the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and many other papers.

THERE HAVE BEEN INNUMERABLE EFFORTS TO FORCE THE LITTLETON DEATHS INTO THE WELL-WORN GROOVES OF SOCIAL CONFLICT.

There have been innumerable efforts to force the Littleton deaths into the well-worn grooves of social conflict—including some flat-footed attempts by Christian leaders. Franklin Graham, son of the evangelist Billy Graham, used the occasion to denounce the public schools. Boston's Roman Catholic cardinal, Bernard Law, criticized an American society in which guns are "too accessible and too acceptable." "What is causing all this turmoil?" asked Susan Swanson of Chicago's Luther Memorial Church when reached for comment by the Associated Press. "The media? TV? The Internet? Music? Or far-right-wing hate groups?"

Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals worries that "there are some Christian leaders who will use this as proof that there is a pattern of hatred for Christianity in America." An editor at a major Christian magazine complains about the "shameless manipulation of people's grief for evangelizing purposes." An important Protestant theologian warns that Cassie's story should be downplayed to keep it from providing ammunition to those Christian preachers who "pander" to Americans' "desire to pose as victims, when the real martyrs today are in China and Sudan."

When Vice President Gore made a mild speech calling upon God for help in mourning the Littleton students, he was attacked on culture-wars grounds from both the left and the right. In a column in the *Washington Post*, Richard Cohen mocked Gore for failing to make a strong call for gun control, and Focus on the Family's Tom Minnery demanded, "Why is it that only after it is too late . . . is secular government willing to acknowledge God?"

For a huge swath of Americans, this sort of rhetoric has come to seem quite dated in just the 12 days since Klebold and Harris put a gun to Cassie Bernall's head. They're hearing sermons about the surprising works of God in Colorado. They're reading Matthew 10:32: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father." They're listening to a Catholic radio station in Michigan proclaim that Cassie has received "the white crown." They're not thinking about gun control, or grief counseling, or public schools, or the separation of church and state. They're thinking about a change of heart. They're full of astonishment at the birth of an American martyr.

J. Bottum is Books & Arts editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

BORN-AGAIN GORE

by Fred Barnes

Davenport, Iowa

Three days before he came here, Vice President Al Gore appeared at a memorial service for slain students in Littleton, Colorado, where he got a big surprise and a political dividend. The surprise was the size of the crowd in the parking lot of a shopping mall. Expected to be as small as 10,000 people, it grew to a mammoth audience of 70,000. Before the service, Gore and his wife Tipper embraced the parents of all the shooting victims and some of the wounded students. Gore says one parent whispered in his ear, "You've got to tell me these children didn't die in vain. We have to make changes. Promise me we will. Promise." Gore responded, "I promise." After his speech, Gore led a silent march

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through the crowd to a wreath-laying ceremony a half-mile away. Like the funeral procession of Princess Diana, Gore and the bereaved parents and kids had flowers strewn in their path. "It was," says a Gore aide, "the most incredible thing I've ever been to."

The political dividend is that Gore, perhaps more than any politician in the country, now seems to understand the significance of Littleton. "The magnitude of that event is overwhelming," he told a group of students and teachers in Davenport last week. And though he talks up gun control, Gore insists the fallout from Littleton cannot be addressed solely by a legislative agenda or improvements in school safety. It is a defining cultural event, he believes, and its impact will linger. Gore also characterizes Littleton in quasi-religious terms. The boys who killed 12 students and a teacher "simply made a choice in favor of evil over good," he told Democratic supporters here. "We have a mandate to choose good over evil. They did not."

Gore's speech at the memorial service captured some of this. He mentioned Cassie Bernall, the 17-year-old who was killed after affirming her Christian faith, by name. He quoted the Bible eight times. The speech was stridently delivered and was panned by columnist Richard Cohen of the *Washington Post* as "stiff and uninspiring." But in subsequent days, and especially on a trip to Iowa on April 28, Gore has spoken more effectively. He doesn't wait for the issue of Littleton to come up. He raises it. At a house party in Dubuque to promote his presidential candidacy, he mentioned Littleton first, starting with praise for "those who stared death in the face and affirmed their belief in God." Only later did he get around to what he calls his "number one priority" of "keeping prosperity going."

According to Gore, Littleton has "opened up a lot of things," and he's eager to seize the opportunity. So when Tom Brokaw invited him to co-host a town meeting on MSNBC on the "lessons of Littleton," Gore rearranged his schedule and appeared on the stage of a Des Moines high school with 50 people. (Afterwards, he went to the library for three local TV interviews.) Gore repeated all the liberal boilerplate about gun control, media violence, and the need for more high school guidance counselors and mental health care. Brokaw put him on the spot by asking why he'd been to see *The Matrix*, a highly violent new movie. Gore said the movie had a "sophisticated plot in which the action made sense."

Al Gore

Kevin Chadwick

The striking thing about Gore's appearances in Des Moines, Dubuque, and Davenport was that he didn't overstate his case. He said opponents of gun control have a point when they claim it's not the answer to school violence. But it's "part of the answer," Gore said. Violence in movies, TV, and video games may not have a bad influence on most kids, he said, but some are "pushed over the line" to commit violent acts. He agreed with evangelist Franklin Graham that America has a "problem of the heart." He overreached only when he linked school violence to sprawl, one of his favorite targets. Schools are so big that counselors can't spot the troubled kids who later shoot and kill, Gore suggested. "It may be that [Columbine High School in Littleton] was just too big," he said, adding, "The issue of sprawl doesn't apply just to communities."

Wherever he goes, Gore says he was deeply moved by his trip to Littleton. He sounds sincere about this, and it's made him a born-again Hollywood basher. Brokaw taunted him about all the money Democrats get from Hollywood moguls and dared Gore to criticize them. Gore did. He said he'd meet with Hollywood executives and "put it to them." And Gore boasted he's already been calling Internet executives to seek curbs on violent and pornographic Web sites.

What's the political impact of Gore's emphasis on Littleton? For one thing, it helps the Clinton administration to have Gore out front and not Clinton. Both the president and Gore sense the country is now more receptive to gun control, and Clinton is fine at delivering the gun control message. But Gore also has recognized something more important, the

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national hunger for a moral response to Littleton. Clinton could deliver that message, too, but no one would take him seriously. When Gore, a straight arrow in his private life, emphasizes the role of right and wrong, good and evil, in Littleton, no one snickers.

I think Gore's embrace of Littleton could give his presidential chances a nudge. He stands pretty much alone on the issue. Neither Bill Bradley, his Democratic foe, nor most of the Republican presidential candidates have had anything compelling to say about Littleton. And the issue helps exactly where Gore needs help, on the values side. Gore is being dragged down in polls because of his association with an immoral president. On Littleton, he's on the side of good, Christianity, and morality. Now, the country will be watching as he pushes his Littleton agenda. If he really pressures Hollywood to tone down its movies and TV shows and gets Internet executives to adopt curbs, we'll all know. And Gore will get kudos.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

MODERATES FOR ALL SEASONS

by David Brooks

SOMEBODY ALMOST SAID SOMETHING MEAN at the Ripon Society's annual dinner last week. Anne Hale Johnson, who is a longtime activist with the moderate Republican flagship organization, was up there at the podium presenting the annual Rough Rider award to congresswoman Connie Morella.

"Connie, I pray for you daily. You are such a gift to the women's movement," Johnson began. But then, whatever train of thought she may have had slipped off the rails, and she started free associating like some country club Kerouac. After a few minutes, she wandered onto forbidden ground, "I am dedicated to the defeat of that group on the right I term the Irreligious Wrong. There is nothing religious about them. Certainly nothing Christian."

FOR ALL THEIR FINANCIAL CAPITAL AND PERSONAL APPEAL, THE MODERATES NEVER QUITE TAKE CONTROL OF THE GOP. THEY LACK INTELLECTUAL HEFT.

It's hard to know how many in that room of moderate Republicans agreed with the sentiment, but in any case you're not supposed to say it in public. A frozen smile hung across the face of ex-representative Susan Molinari. Meanwhile Morella darted up from her table and headed for the microphone, where she interrupted Johnson mid-introduction and began her acceptance talk. The whole point of the Ripon Society is that it stands for big tent Republicanism. You're not supposed to do anything that might make anyone feel excluded—even those right-wing zealots with the fetus posters. The essence of Ripon is that you're supposed to be nice.

This year's Ripon dinner was twice as large as last, a sign of the recent ascendance of the moderate wing of the GOP. "I'm a moderate and I'm proud of it!" Senator Jim Jeffords exclaimed, before neatly summarizing the recent history of his party. "We're pushed back in the background when things are going well for the party. But when things are going rough it's, 'Bring on the moderates.'"

And so this year's affair was packed with congressmen, and clouds and clouds of lobbyists. The honorees included Senator Chuck Hagel, Ways and Means Committee chairman Bill Archer, and speaker Dennis Hastert. "I want to thank Jim Jeffords for exposing me as a moderate. Now I'll never get elected speaker again ever," Hastert joked, probably knowing that moderates are precisely what the congressional party now longs for in its leaders, so long as they are moderates who call themselves conservatives.

Ripon dinners certainly look different from conservative gatherings. At the Heritage Foundation's annual dinners there are squads of young true believers, gaggles of donor dowagers, and, alongside the appetizer tables, rows of conservative-leaning writers, academics, and policy activists. Similarly, the American Enterprise Institute's annual dinner teems with economists, journalists, sociologists, and future and past assistant secretaries of state. But the Ripon Society, which is also ostensibly an advocacy organization, is practically a wonk-free zone.

And a journalist-free zone. While reporters flock

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to the annual confabs of the picturesque Republican groups, such as the Christian Coalition, I was the only reporter here.

Without any word-people around, the money crowd takes center stage. At the registration desk there was a little sign that read, "Please provide your individual and corporate name." Corporate officials from places like Ameritech actually gave speeches (normally at such affairs, business donors are billed but not heard). And the air during the cocktail hour was filled with lobbyist bonhomie. Even the Teddy Roosevelt impersonator turned out to be a lobbyist.

The event was called the Rough Rider Award Dinner, and each honoree was given a very cool cavalry saber to hang on the wall. Strolling around the room there was a guy dressed up as TR ready to storm San Juan Hill, and a bunch of young men in full leather regalia were dressed up as Rough Riders. The TR lookalike turned out to be Billy Pitts, former top aide to Bob Michael and now a lobbyist for Disney, and when I got to chatting with one of the Rough Riders he handed me a card that indicated he was a government affairs assistant with a law firm.

Which is really the problem with the moderate wing of the Republican party, and the reason why, despite all the failures of the Right, the moderates never really take control of the GOP. Theirs is a movement with plenty of financial capital, and its leaders project a more appealing personality than many conservatives do, but moderate Republicans lack intellectual heft. That means the moderates end up thinking tactically—like lobbyists—but rarely strategically—like idea-mavens. They don't articulate distinctive principles that might inspire followers and attract media attention. They tend not to come up with big policy proposals, but are more likely to adapt the ideas that come from right or left. Rather than being a driving force in Republican politics, the moderates are the pause button in between conservative screw-ups.

Their weakness makes the success of moderate Democrats look all the more impressive. The Democratic Leadership Council didn't just define itself negatively against the excesses of the liberal wing of its party. The Democratic moderates actually created a grandiose governing philosophy, the Third Way, which fires up people like Al Gore and Tony Blair and crowds out competing liberal visions. The DLC magazine, the *New Democrat*, is substantive and crunchy. The DLC now occupies the political ground moderate Republicans should have made their own.

One suspects in the end the Ripon Society's geniality is part of its problem. It embraces Teddy Roosevelt in theory, but temperamentally, Republican moderates are everything TR detested. He was confrontational. He was bellicose. He ascribed bad motives to anyone who dared disagree with him. And above all, he despised corporate pragmatists—while the moderates, for better or worse, are mostly that.

David Brooks is a senior editor of **THE WEEKLY STANDARD.**

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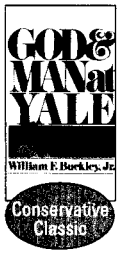

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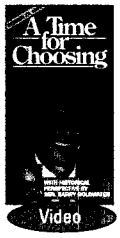

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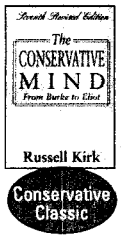

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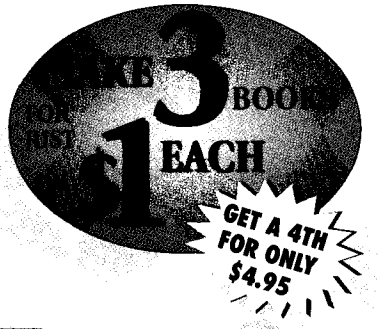

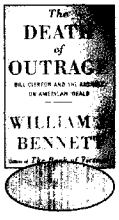

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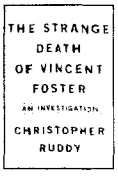

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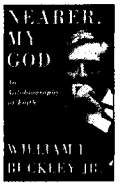

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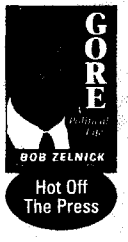

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"Do You Believe in God?" "Yes."

MATT LABASH on the Life and Death of Cassie Bernall

Littleton, Colorado

Walk around Clement Park, just outside the police cordon that encircles Columbine High and the first thing you notice is the silence. Since the April 20 massacre that claimed the lives of 12 students, 1 teacher, and 2 killers, the place has been full of schoolchildren and curiosity seekers, media trucks and mourners. Thousands pace slowly over mud-caked, hay-covered trails that wind through hundreds of shrines to the departed. They stay for hours. They return the next day. There is no memorial service, no snackbar, and for the most part no talking. Instead, baby-clutching women stare with red-rimmed eyes. Husbands subtly nudge their sunglasses, draining salty reservoirs that have collected at the bottom of their frames.

The second thing one notices is the makeshift memorials. With all the construction paper and flowers and balloons and stuffed bears, it looks as if several dozen Hallmark shops had been overturned in a twister. But the cards are homemade, and their prayers and verses and valentines to the dead run from adolescent bathos to shell-shocked understatement ("Sorry for what happened," one fifth-grader wrote).

The third thing one notices is the presence of God, who has surely pitched camp in Littleton. Even the agnostics approach this hallowed ground with the reverential awe of a high priest entering the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. You see it too with the often ill-mannered reporters, who don't know whether to roll tape or to remove their shoes and walk in backwards.

The place feels like a Pentecostal tent meeting with the sound turned down. But instead of ululating or pew-hurdling, attendees form impromptu prayer circles on top of Mt. Columbine, a steep hill overlooking the campus where usually the track team tax their quadriceps. Several dozen mourners stand near a cross singing Scripture songs and Christian karaoke in worshipful, unrehearsed rounds. Everywhere, it seems, acts of mercy are committed. In one instance, a woman attempts to scrawl "evil bastard" on a cross bearing the name of one of the Trenchcoat Mafiosi, only to have her pen taken away, while strangers sing "Amazing Grace."

Matt Labash is a staff writer for The Weekly Standard.

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The Columbine massacre, even by massacre standards, is a stubborn story, one that won't quite recede. It is not sticking around just because it makes good copy, but because it demands an explanation: "Why?" as both *Newsweek* and *U.S. News* simultaneously asked in their cover lines. There is no dearth of opinions on that subject, as evidenced by the MSNBC windsocks who inflate on cue, apportioning blame to everything from lax gun laws to Marilyn Manson to high cholesterol to problem skin.

But here in Littleton, and increasingly throughout the rest of the country, another explanation is gaining currency—and that explanation resides largely in the person of one of the victims, Cassie Bernall.

On April 20, the 17-year-old junior was a typical teenager having a typical day. A devout Christian, Cassie drew solace from her faith—except when it came to that bane of many a girl's existence, her looks. Not that there was anything wrong with her looks. She had crystalmint eyes, McIntosh cheeks, and a smile that should've netted her an Ultra Brite contract. She was convinced, however, that she needed to lose weight.

She dressed for school in a turquoise shirt with a white undershirt, her favorite jeans (a little snug on top, a little flared on the bottom), and her beat-up Doc Martens. Around second period, she had a friendly tiff with her best friend at Columbine, 16-year-old Amanda Meyer. "You tried to tell her how pretty she was and she got mad at you," says Meyer. "One of the things she said was how bad she looked and look at what she was wearing. That's why I happened to notice it. Later that night, I had to describe it to investigators."

That Tuesday morning, Cassie asked Amanda if she wanted to meet in the library for lunch. Though several friends had invited Cassie to eat off campus, she wanted to study. "If I'm there, I'm there," said Amanda. But just before lunch—and just after she spoke to Cassie for the last time, telling her, "Never forget that you're beautiful"—Amanda spilled a drink on her shirt and went home to change.

A little past 11 A.M., Cassie walked to the library, toting a backpack with a "What Would Jesus Do?" bracelet pinned on it. She sat down at one of the blond, faux-wood tables where she often read her Bible. Today, she studied *Macbeth*, for an English class two periods away. Around 11:30 A.M., a teacher barreled through the library doors, frantically screaming that someone was shooting students. Eighteen-year-old Eric Harris and 17-year-old Dylan Klebold had started their killing spree in the cafeteria, and by the time they blasted their way into the library, removing their black dusters to reveal their ammo belts and TEC 9 semiautomatics, all library patrons had ducked under the tables. Of the 13 murders, 10 took place in this room.

After declaring their intent to kill their jock rivals, Harris and Klebold expanded the roster to blacks and anyone else who drew breath. One of the gunmen spotted a cowering schoolmate under a table, cried, "Peekaboo," then killed her. One identified football player Isaiah Shoels as "a nigger," then shot him in the head as he begged to go home. Crystal Woodman, a 16-year-old junior from the same church youth group as Cassie, huddled with two of their friends whispering prayers for protection, as the killers "whooped and hollered like it was a game," says Woodman. "They'd be like, 'Who's next?'" Woodman thought she was, as one shooter came so close he pushed a chair into her arm. Somehow, she was spared.

"She was scared but she sounded strong. Like she knew what she was going to answer."

The gunmen worked their way around to Cassie, who, like the rest of her classmates, was hunched under a table, visibly praying. One of the gunmen asked her, "Do you believe in God?" "It was really cruel the way he said it," says Joshua Lapp, a 16-year-old sophomore who was hiding some 25 feet away. "It was almost like Satan was trying to talk through him." Cassie paused before answering. Then, while presumably staring down a gun barrel, she replied, "Yes."

"She was scared, but she sounded strong," says

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"Cassie wasn't going to listen to anything; she was into black magic, the dark stuff."

Lapp, "like she knew what she was going to answer." Unsatisfied with her answer, the gunman asked, "Why?" Before Cassie could respond, he shot and killed her.

It is natural enough that after such a bold stand, Cassie Bernall has been portrayed as a martyr for her faith, not just by friends and family, but by everyone from Al Gore to Franklin Graham (son of Billy). Perhaps it is our frailty that causes us to devour stories like hers. Death summons us all, and our best hope is to see our invitation delayed in the mail until the glorious hereafter beckons us as octogenarians. But when the young, like Cassie, are brutally cut down, the living who were cheated try to cheat back. We do this by ascribing meaning to the loss, by planing the senselessness off a "senseless tragedy." And in so doing, we harbor faith, our hedge against randomness. In fact, this faith, Cassie's faith, rejects randomness entirely. It affirms instead that seemingly arbitrary events are orchestrated, for reasons that may remain unknown. As Thomas Lynch, mortician by trade and poet by calling, has written, "Events unfold in ways that make us think of God. They achieve in their happening a symmetry and order that would be frightening if assigned to chance."

Some skeptics might assert that Cassie's death, though tragic, does not rise to martyrdom. Getting shot by a couple of crazed Goth geeks who were murdering all comers may not reach the dramatic demises of our first-century martyrs: Stephen stoned outside the city gates while praying for his executioners, Peter crucified upside down, John the Baptist handed his head. Some suggest that Cassie might not even have been targeted, that she'd have been shot regardless of her answer, as were so many others who weren't athletes, blacks, or Christians. To this, her youth pastor Dave McPherson answers, "I turn that around and say, Why did they ask *her*? Because they knew what she was."

What she was has emerged over the last week in obituary roundups. Cassie was a born-again Christian who loved writing and photography. She carried a Bible to school, and her favorite film was *Braveheart* (the story of the Scottish patriot William Wallace, who battled Edward I and who, for his trouble, was drawn and quartered, his head turned into an adornment for London Bridge).

But to really know Cassie, one needn't bother watching Mel Gibson films. Nor is it absolutely necessary to spend time with her bereaved parents. I tried, and they declined, not because they're averse to talking to the media, but because, as her selfless mother Misty told me only a week after her daughter's death, "There are just too many of her friends who are coming over here every day. They need us right now."

Everything one needs to know about Cassie can be found by driving out to the western cusp of Littleton, past the condos and the dollar movie theaters and the faceless chainstores, where the West Bowles Community Church abuts the low-slung, snowcapped foothills of the Rockies.

It is here that Cassie Bernall's funeral was held, with overflow crowds flooding the aisles and anterooms. Some were strangers who came from as far away as Florida, clicking pictures of the closed casket

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of the brave girl who died proclaiming her faith. Others were beefy ex-Crips, drug addicts and felons from the Victory Outreach program in the roughneck Five Points section of Denver. There, Cassie used to go to minister in one-on-one chats with street converts who had rap sheets longer than her hair.

This is the church where her parents brought her two years ago, and not of her own volition. When she was in middle school, an adolescent rebellious phase took an ugly turn, and Cassie started fancying a crowd not unlike the one Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold favored. She was trying drugs and contemplating suicide and dabbling in witchcraft. Her friends did more, sometimes spending their Saturdays sacrificing cats. Her worried parents forced her into a sit-down with youth pastor Dave McPherson, whose prognosis was bleak. "We have a lot of rough kids come through here," he says. "Those trenchcoat kids could come into our youth group and fit in perfectly if they tried." But after attempting to talk to Cassie, he simply thought, "She's gone. There's some kids you meet that you think there's a chance, and there's other kids that you say 'She's gone.' I never gave Cassie a hope. She was disconnected, she wasn't going to listen to anything, she was into black magic, the dark stuff."

McPherson recommended that her parents administer a shock-treatment regimen: Withdraw Cassie from school to get her away from her old friends, shut off her phone, and sequester her in the house. Her parents agreed and enrolled her in a Christian school. Once she was there, a new friend invited Cassie to attend a Christian camp, where Cassie ended up accepting Christ. Her 22-year-old youth leader, Jeremiah Quinonez, recalls her transformation: "Before, she was extremely shut down. She wouldn't talk, you could hardly get her to smile. When she came back from that trip, she was glowing. She said, 'You know what, I went to this church camp, and a bunch of people prayed around me. I don't know what happened, but I was just changed. I felt this huge burden lifted off of my heart.'"

While Cassie often belittled her looks, her new smile was generally regarded as her best feature. That, or the waist-length blonde hair that almost ceased to be. "She wanted to cut off her hair and give it to this place that makes hair for kids who go through chemo," says Sara Romes, a 15-year-old member of Cassie's youth group. "She wanted to cut it off pretty short, so that there would be enough to supply three or four kids."

Sitting in her church, canvassing her friends, I hear story upon story similarly celebrating Cassie's graciousness. Even after her funeral, many call her a "living example." In fact, this desire to serve is at least partly responsible for her being in the building where she lost her life. After her conversion, Cassie insisted on leaving her Christian school and enrolling in Columbine. The reason, she told her friend Amanda Meyer, was: "How can I witness to kids at a Christian

"I don't know what happened, but I was just changed. I felt this huge burden lift off of my heart."

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school? I have to go to public school to be a witness to *those* kids."

Transferring to Columbine as a sophomore, Cassie never fully assimilated. She attended Bible Club and was universally loved by the sizable youth group contingent that went to Columbine (47 kids from West Bowles Community Church were in the school building on April 20, though only Cassie was killed). But her friends say her unassuming manner and quiet spirit earned her neither scorn nor notice.

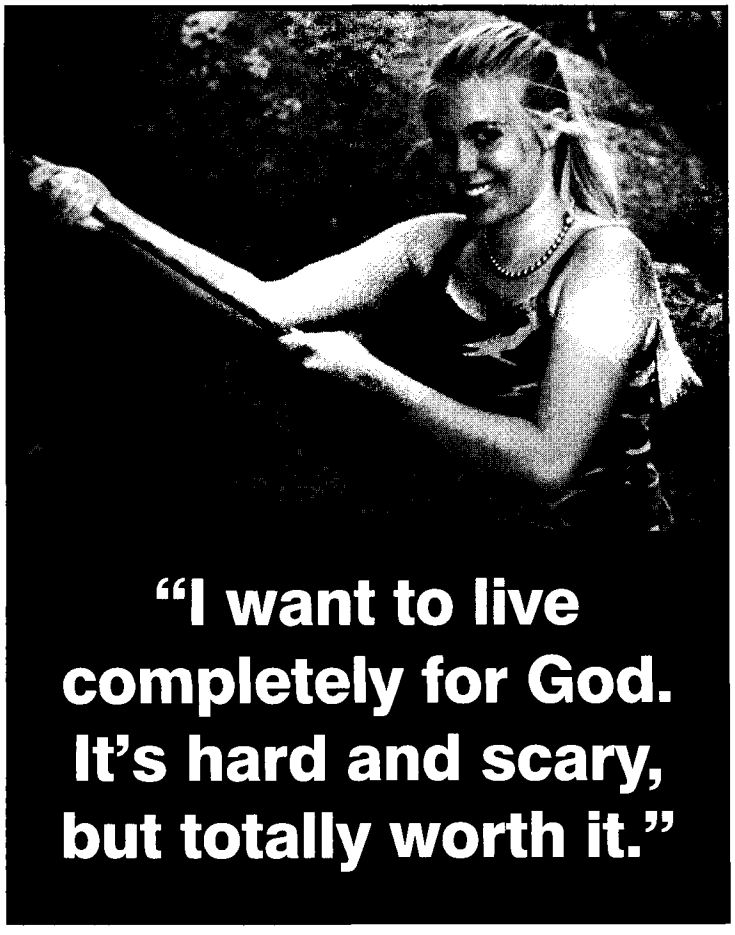
Like most teenagers, she suffered from self-image deficiencies and unrequited crushes. Though plenty of guys found her attractive, "she only wanted a godly man," says Sara Romes. That narrowed the eligible pool.

As her friends generously share Cassie's correspondence and conversations, it is apparent that Cassie was not merely some silly teenybopper, dashing off overwrought notes full of exclamation points and smiley faces. Instead, one is prepared to believe that the last days of her life may have been preparation for her death, that the greatest testament of her "living example" is that she has ceased to live among us.

In a letter last June to her friend Cassandra Chance, she noodled over her life's purpose, a perpetual concern: "Some people become missionaries and things, but what about me? What does God have in store for me? . . . Isn't it amazing this plan we're a part of? I mean, it's a pretty big thing to be a part of God's plan!"

About a month ago, the day after a long discussion with trigonometry classmate Craig Nason about what it means to fully surrender to God, she greeted Nason with four notecards filled with exhortations pulled from sources as varied as C.S. Lewis and Johnny Cash. Before signing off "In His name, Cassie B.," as was her custom, she copied a translation of Luke 6:38: "If you give, you will get! Your gift will return to you in full and overflowing measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over."

In another letter written about two weeks ago to Amanda Meyer, Cassie fretted over whether she'd ever marry: "It's so frustrating to be patient and wait for God's perfect timing. It's so hard to remember that his timing is not our timing. That he knows best. I need to learn to trust, be faithful and trusting . . . and choose his will." The night before she died, she wrote a letter that she gave to Amanda the next day. Her P.S. read, "Honestly, I want to live completely for God, it's hard and scary, but totally worth it."



That same Tuesday morning, she saw Craig Nason. As she told him how excited she was about their Bible study that evening, he noticed she had underlined a paragraph in their devotions book, *Seeking Peace*. In part, it read: "We can only win our lives when we remain faithful to the truth that every little part of us, yes, every hair, is completely safe in the divine embrace of our Lord. To say it differently; when we keep living a spiritual life, we have nothing to be afraid of."

What some call eerie prescience, others label divine appointment. The day after Cassie died, her brother found a poem on her dresser. He gave it to Dave McPherson, who included it in her funeral program. Following Christ's admonition to the disci-

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ples, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me," Cassie wrote:

> *Now I have given up on everything else—I have found it to be the only way to really know Christ and to experience the mighty power that brought him back to life again, and to find out what it really means to suffer and to die with him.*

Just days after she wrote the poem, that's precisely what she did. And as police officer Wayne Depew walked through the library carnage, himself having almost lost a son in the massacre, he saw Cassie lying on her back under a table. Depew didn't even notice the bullet hole in her temple. Instead, he says, her hands were clutched to her chest, as if in prayer. "She had a real soft look on her face with a slight smile," he says. "This is just my opinion, but she looked as if she had accepted God's will, that she was going to die for what she believed in."

Back at West Bowles Community Church, there are very few surprises. Nearly every characterization of Cassie calls her an angel. Nearly every conversation shows her youth-group mates to be so sweetly and earnestly endearing that it almost hurts your teeth. But what is surprising, just one week after Cassie died, is that I don't find any of her friends still crying. In the youth chapel, where the lovely ladies of the Jefferson Center for Mental Health have set up grief-counseling camp, with artesian water jugs and cookie tins, they sit alone, talking to each other, itching to dispense invaluable tips like "Structure your time—keep busy," and "Give yourself permission to feel rotten."

"There are more of them than there are us," says Sara Romes. Like most of the youth, she steers clear unless she wants a cookie. Dave McPherson, who stayed up three days straight while grieving the loss of Cassie and the other Columbine victims, now says that her death should be celebrated as well as mourned. "We can sit in this building and grieve, or we can get out and spread the Gospel," says McPherson. "A week ago, I couldn't have mentioned God in school, and now everybody wants to talk about God. So we're ready to go, and Cassie gave us the opportunity."

"Some people become missionaries, but what about me? What does God have in store for me?"

As for whether Cassie will enter the pantheon of the faith's great martyrs, McPherson is unconcerned: "She was just like every other teenage kid. She wanted popularity, thought maybe she weighed a little too much, when she would dance, she wasn't in tune. . . . Cassie wasn't perfect. But you don't have to be perfect to be a martyr. You just have to be prepared, and Cassie was. She was prepared to give up her life." ♦

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ELECTING THE SUPREME COURT

By Daniel E. Troy

Republicans and Democrats often sound alike when it comes to economic and even some social issues. It's sometimes enough to make one wonder where their differences lie. But the parties do have radically opposed visions of the proper role of judges—one of the most important issues of the 2000 presidential election. The next president is almost certain to determine the direction of the Supreme Court and the lower federal courts for decades.

The current Supreme Court could hardly be more closely divided over important social issues. Consider those the Court recently decided by only one vote: the constitutionality of racial preferences and districting intended to empower minorities; whether there are limits on Congress's power to legislate; the right of death row inmates to litigate endlessly; and the legality of direct or indirect aid to students who attend parochial school. The Court is also narrowly divided on abortion, and could soon be forced to decide whether a ban on partial-birth abortions is constitutional.

COURT-WATCHERS BELIEVE THE NEXT PRESIDENT WILL HAVE THREE OPENINGS TO FILL. THE CONSEQUENCES CAN HARDLY BE OVERSTATED.

One new appointment alone could dramatically change the course of constitutional law. And most Court-watchers believe the next president will have three openings to fill. Chief Justice William Rehnquist, 74, his Stanford law school classmate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, 68, and Justice John Paul Stevens, 78, are all expected to retire during the next president's term. A Democratic victory in the 2000 presidential election would have drastic consequences. If Rehnquist or O'Connor did leave, the moderately conservative majority they make up with Justices Antonin Scalia, 63, Anthony Kennedy, 62, and Clarence Thomas, 50, would become a dissenting minority. But it would take only one additional Democratic appointee to put the liberal wing of the Court—which consists of Justices Stevens, David Souter, 59, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 66, and Stephen Breyer, 60—in control. On the other hand, two new conservative justices, if they replaced Stevens and O'Connor, could presumably make five votes to overturn *Roe* v. *Wade*.

Many recognize that the next presidential election will determine the Court's positions on racial preferences and racial gerrymandering. In 1989, the Supreme Court held that state-imposed racial preferences were unconstitutional. Despite that decision, in 1990 the Court upheld racial preferences by the federal government by a one-vote margin. Five years later, the Court reversed that decision, 5-4 (Clarence Thomas's substitution for Thurgood Marshall made the difference).

A conservative Republican appointee would likely vote to keep in place the current regime banning preferences. Conversely, there is little doubt that, if the liberal justices were to gain control of the Court, they would revert to the 1990 rule allowing racial preferences by the federal government. They would probably uphold state-imposed affirmative action as well if it were justified by the need to address past discrimination. Although the Supreme Court is supposed to adhere to the principle of *stare decisis*—respecting past decisions—it does so less frequently in constitutional cases. What is more, *stare decisis* has been said to be less operative where an earlier decision was adopted "by the narrowest of margins, over spirited dissents challenging the basic underpinnings of those decisions."

The so-called civil rights community is well aware of the importance of the next president's appointments to the Court. As a result, it is playing for time, hoping for just one more Democratic appointment. This desire for delay explains why, in 1997, black civil rights groups ponied up roughly $300,000 to settle a

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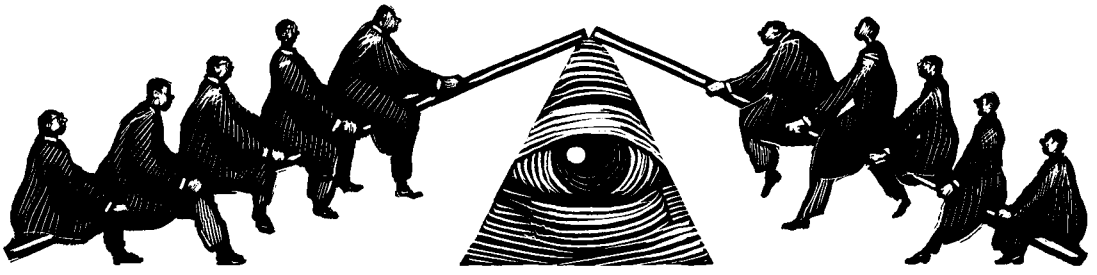
controversial affirmative action case the Supreme Court had agreed to hear involving a white Piscataway, N.J., school teacher who had been laid off to preserve the job of a black teacher. As Piscataway school board lawyer David Rubin said, "Once the case was accepted by the Court," civil rights groups "raised a genuine concern that an adverse ruling in this case could gut the infrastructure of affirmative action across the country." Defending the decision to pay off the white teacher, former transportation secretary and longtime civil rights advocate William T. Coleman Jr. told the *Washington Post*: "I don't wish anyone misfortune, but people do retire."

Even the current, supposedly conservative, Supreme Court held unconstitutional, as a violation of the equal protection clause, Colorado's Proposition 2, which would have barred preferential treatment based on sexual orientation. Given this decision, it is certainly conceivable that the next Court appointment will also determine the legality of ballot initiatives such as California's Proposition 209, which barred all discrimination, including preferences based on race, color, creed, national origin, and sex. Indeed, one Carter appointee, California district court judge Thelton Henderson, initially struck down Prop. 209 on the ground that it violated the Constitution's guarantee of equal protection under the laws. Of this mandate for color blindness, Henderson said, "Proposition 209 was enacted 'because of,' not merely 'in spite of,' its adverse effects upon affirmative action, and thus . . . was effectively drawn for racial purposes." He was reversed by a panel of Reagan- and Bush-appointed court of appeals judges.

Racial gerrymandering has also been found unconstitutional, whether blacks or whites are the purported beneficiaries. The civil rights community justifiably condemned the use of race to draw bizarre congressional districts that denied blacks and other minorities the power to elect representatives of their choice. They have, however, endorsed the use of race to draw so-called majority-minority districts, no matter how strange their shape. In 1994, again by a one-vote margin, and with Stevens, Souter, Ginsburg, and Breyer dissenting, the Court held that race could not be the predominant factor in drawing district lines, even to guarantee the election of minorities. These justices have continued to dissent in every subsequent case applying that decision. An additional Democratic vote would almost certainly cause a reversal, which would revive a practice that, according to the hardly radical Justice O'Connor, "bears an uncomfortable resemblance to political apartheid."

The bloc that includes Rehnquist, O'Connor, Scalia, Kennedy, and Thomas has also decided to limit some of the federal government's power. For example, in *United States* v. *Lopez*, these five ruled that the Gun-Free School Zones Act exceeded Congress's authority under the commerce clause. Possessing a gun in a school zone, they reasoned, is not an activity that substantially affects interstate commerce. This decision marked the first time in sixty years that a federal law regulating private conduct was invalidated as beyond Congress's commerce-clause power. Similarly, in *Printz* v. *United States*, this same majority held that the Brady Act's requirement that state officials run background checks on prospective gun buyers was unconstitutional because it conscripted state officers into enforcing federal law.



Kevin Chadwick

Although the Court has not again applied the *Lopez* decision, its principal finding that there are limits to the scope of federal authority has important legal as well as political consequences (as Michael Greve shows in his important new book *Real Federalism: Why It Matters, How it Could Happen*). The mere existence of cases like *Lopez* and *Printz* forces Congress to consider whether a particular measure, however politi-

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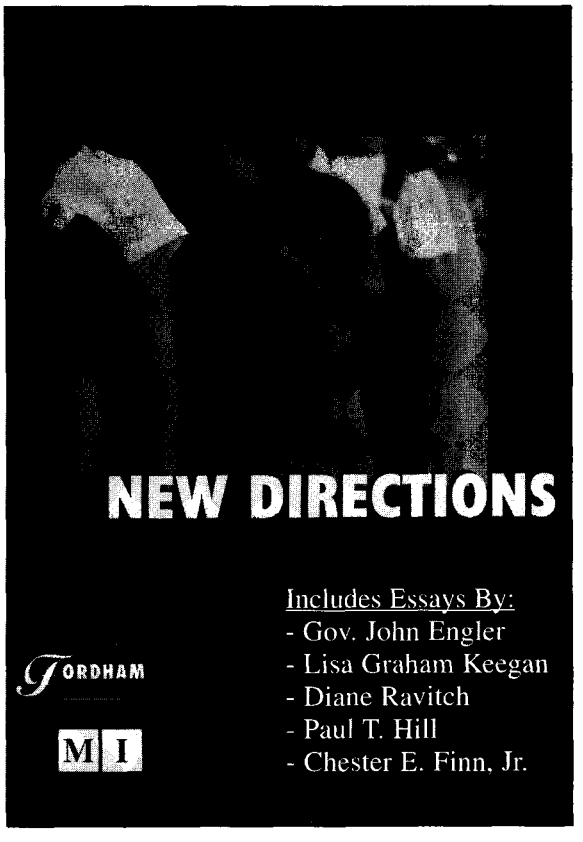
cally attractive, is within its competence and power. These cases also give needed constitutional ammunition to pro-federalism legislators. And just a few weeks ago, a federal court of appeals relied on *Lopez* in holding that certain provisions of the Violence Against Women Act were beyond Congress's power. The fate of this reassertion of federalist principle turns on the next presidential election.

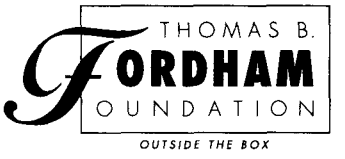
The Rehnquist bloc has limited earlier Supreme Court attempts to excise religion from the public square. In 1985 the Supreme Court held that the First Amendment's prohibition against the establishment of religion barred New York City from sending public school personnel into parochial schools to provide remedial education to disadvantaged students (which they would have received had they attended public schools). There had been no example of a government employee providing religious instruction during the program's nineteen years. Nevertheless, the Court ruled the program unconstitutional under a Catch-22 precedent: Merely policing the program to ensure that church and state did not get entangled was itself so entangling as to make the program unconstitutional. As a result, for more than a decade, children whose parents chose to send them to parochial school were denied remedial-reading assistance, counseling, and other services.

In this case, *Aguilar* v. *Felton*, the Supreme Court went further than ever before in its establishment-clause jurisprudence. *Aguilar* made it impossible for the government not to discriminate against those choosing to send their children to religious schools. Two years ago, by a one-vote margin, the Court reversed *Aguilar*. Calling the initial determination "correct and sensible," Justice Souter wrote in dissent, for the same liberal four, that the Court had breached its previous "flat ban on subsidization."

Relying on the Supreme Court's more recent decisions, the Wisconsin Supreme Court held that Milwaukee's school choice plan was not unconstitutional

The Most Incisive Analyses of Education Policy





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even though money ended up in parochial schools—because parents, not government, decided where the money went. There is, however, an outdated Warren Court authority that would, if applied, seem to invalidate any school choice plan that offered parochial schools as an option. Most Court-watchers believe that, at present, there are no more than five votes for upholding school choice plans that include parochial schools. The next election will likely determine whether religious schools may be included in school choice plans, the constitutionality of which is currently being litigated in six states.

School choice is not the only new issue the Court will soon have to decide. As of September 1998, 25 states had adopted bans on partial-birth abortions. In 17 of those states, judges had permanently or temporarily enjoined the enforcement of the law. The Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals struck down Ohio's partial-birth abortion ban as "overbroad" because, it said, the law could be construed as prohibiting more commonly used, ostensibly protected abortion procedures. The current Supreme Court would almost certainly uphold such laws, particularly if they were limited to partial-birth abortions during the third trimester, when the Court has said abortions may be banned. A new appointment to the bench could, however, lead to the invalidation of partial-birth abortion bans. And new appointments could, of course, lead to the reversal of *Roe* v. *Wade*, moving the abortion debate back to the state legislatures or, perhaps, Congress.

REPUBLICAN APPOINTEES TO THE SUPREME COURT ARE FAR MORE LIKELY TO TURN LEFT THAN DEMOCRATIC APPOINTEES ARE TO TURN RIGHT.

Although not much has been done to reverse the dramatic Warren Court-era expansion of criminal rights, the Rehnquist bloc has prevailed in a number of important cases that illustrate what is at stake in the next election. In recent years, the Court has, by one vote, turned back arguments that criminals could prevent parole boards from considering evidence seized in violation of the Fourth Amendment. The same narrow majority has rejected the argument that a prison must give an inmate adequate notice and a hearing before punishing him with disciplinary segregation. The same group of five also refused to allow death row inmates to raise in federal court entirely new claims that they hadn't brought up either on direct appeal or in state habeas corpus proceedings.

The situation at the Supreme Court is mirrored at the federal court of appeals level, where most important legal decisions are made. In particular, it is primarily the courts of appeal that constrain overregulation by federal agencies. After eight years of Clinton appointments, two-thirds of the circuit courts are either controlled by Democratic appointees, or have reached a "tipping point." Of twelve circuits, three are now controlled by Democratic appointees, and one stands at equipoise. Reagan and Bush appointees still control eight, but four of them by only one vote. The next wave of appointments will be crucial.

As important as whether the next president is a Republican or Democrat is whether the president, if a Republican, is willing to commit political capital to the appointment of judges committed to a philosophy of textualism and originalism. When President Bush appointed David Souter, administration aides touted him as a "stealth candidate." Once appointed, Souter became a reliable vote for liberal positions. Republican appointees to the Supreme Court are far more likely to turn left once on the bench than Democratic appointees are likely to even pay lip service to the right. Indeed, neither Breyer nor Ginsburg, although often mislabeled "centrists," has yet disappointed the Clinton administration in a single close, high-profile, politically sensitive case.

The reason judges, particularly Supreme Court justices, tend only to grow to the left has been explained most eloquently by Judge Robert Bork (for whom I clerked). Elite culture, and particularly legal culture, pushes judges to be liberal activists. Only those judges who are truly committed to a philosophy of textualism and originalism, and who are willing to endure the opprobrium of the Washington media, have been able to consistently withstand this cultural force.

Given the effect of the Supreme Court and the federal judiciary on the lives of Americans, it is arguable that the appointment of federal judges is a president's most important domestic function. If you care about racial preferences, partial-birth abortions and the abortion right more generally, expanded criminal rights, and school choice, then you should care about the next president's appointments to the federal courts, for they will determine whose views on these issues will prevail. ♦

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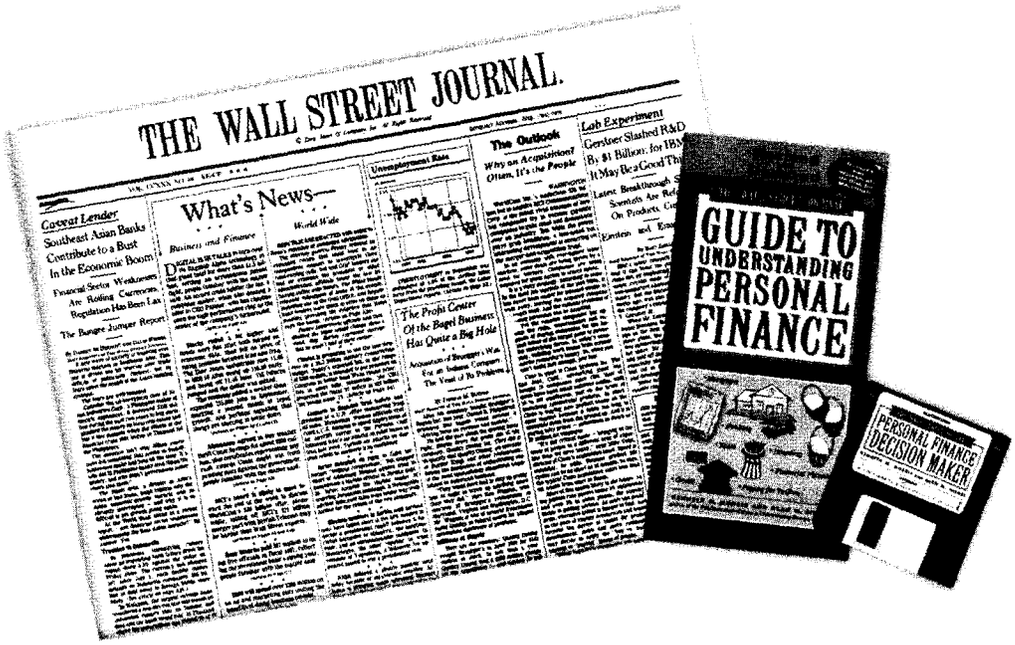

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The Art of Art Collecting

by Libby Sternberg

All photos: Bancroft / Baltimore Museum of Art

Could serious artists survive without the National Endowment for the Arts? Could Americans tell what constitutes worthwhile art? There are enough American club rooms hung with pictures of poker-playing puppies and doe-eyed waifs to suggest that the answer is no.

But there's a collection at the Baltimore Museum of Art that tells a different story. It's a lively gathering of early twentieth-century work that includes a good number of Matisses and Picassos as well as a Gauguin. And it was assembled, long before the NEA, by an eccentric pair of Baltimore spinsters named Etta and Claribel Cone. The Cone sisters prove that an American of means can—without the help of the professional connoisseurs and a government-financed art establishment—identify and support the first-rate art of their own time.

The art historian Mary Gabriel first encountered the Cone collection as an art student, when she went to view the tiny room, "no bigger than a large closet," in which the paintings were exhibited. And in her recent volume, *The Art of Acquiring: A Portrait of Etta and Claribel Cone*, she sets out to explain what motivated these women to collect art that was as controversial in their day as Robert Mapplethorpe's photography has been in ours.

The Cone sisters were no libertines living the raucous life of bohemian expatriates in 1920s Paris. As Gabriel discovered, they were instead strait-laced spinsters. "Why," the author asks, "did two seemingly severe, upright women, who clung to the cloak of Victorianism in their dress and attitude, surround themselves with avant-garde and largely erotic art?"

MARY GABRIEL
The Art of Acquiring
A Portrait of Etta and Claribel Cone
Bancroft, 260 pp., $29.95

Gabriel doesn't entirely succeed in finding an answer, and in the end, the reader is left with the sense that the Cone sisters are laughing at the attempt to explain their motivations—perhaps with lace handkerchiefs daintily covering their mouths.

What stands in the way of understanding these ladies is a certain bias—our own, as well as Gabriel's. We have trouble believing that it may have been exactly their old-fashioned ways that made them such imaginative collectors. Their moral and cultural rootedness may have been what gave them the imaginitive freedom that "free spirits" often fail to achieve. Never thinking it was their lot to overturn the art world placed them in an excellent position to support those who did.

The Cone sisters were born in the late 1800s, two of thirteen children—the offspring of a Jewish merchant living in Tennessee. Even though their East Tennessee neighbors were Union supporters, their father had been sympathetic to the South during the Civil War, and eventually he relocated to the "border town" of Baltimore. The family prospered; the Cone store became the Cone Export and Commission Company, a selling and financing agent for forty-seven southern cotton mills—a business that provided a comfortable income for Etta and Claribel throughout their lives.

From these wealthy but unexceptional circumstances, the sisters grew into quiet mavericks. Claribel attended a woman's medical college, where one of her fellow students was Gertrude Stein, who had come to Baltimore to live with relatives after her parents'

Libby Sternberg is a freelance writer in Rutland, Vermont, and a regular commentator on Vermont Public Radio.

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Sneaking off for a cigarette in 1903: From left to right, a cousin, Claribel, and Etta. Inset: Henri Matisse's drawings of the Cone sisters.

death. Stein and her brother Leo were to become influential friends of the Cone sisters.

Claribel Cone arranged for Stein to address a Baltimore women's group in 1900. The topic was "The Value of a College Education for Women," and Stein implored women not to waste their early years learning the "mysteries of self-adornment." The Cone sisters took the lesson to heart: When family responsibilities (in the case of Etta) and college (in the case of Claribel) no longer detained them, they used their freedom to pursue lives of culture.

Etta took her first trip abroad in 1901, visiting Florence, where she started to learn about art from the Steins. Gabriel hints, in fact, that Etta had a crush on Leo Stein. It was Leo who told Etta, "Keep your eye on the object and let your ideas play about it." At this point in her life, however, Etta's views mostly mirrored those of the more sophisticated Steins. Her diffidence, however, soon "began to change . . . as she became more acquainted with art."

The Steins first led the Cone sisters into collecting art. Gertrude, having "discovered" Picasso and Matisse, invited Etta to their dilapidated Paris studios. Whether Etta began buying the artists' works out of a genuine appreciation for their mastery or from a sense of "romantic charity" is unclear. But her forays into art turned into a lifelong project with its own momentum quite separate from the Steins. Nor was it charity that eventually made Etta a great collector; rather she developed an affinity for art that became a great and dominating passion.

In retrospect, it's easy to underestimate how daring it was to patronize the likes of Matisse and Picasso. But when the Cones bought their paintings and drawings, their works had no market and the artists themselves were bitterly denounced by both art professionals and the public at large. The French critic Marcel Nicolle said of Matisse: "What is presented to us here—apart from the materials employed—has nothing whatever to do with painting."

These criticisms were echoed in America. Of a Matisse sculpture, a New York critic wrote: "It is hard to be patient with these impossible travesties in the human form. . . . Indeed it is unbelievable that some men can justify these on any possible grounds." Another New York critic declared: "They are coarse. . . . They are narrow. . . . To us they are revolting in their inhumanity." Not even American artists welcomed Matisse. John Singer Sargent said his paintings were "worthless." In 1912, the portrait painter Howard Cushing dissuaded Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney from purchasing a Matisse sculpture (a piece the Cone sisters later bought).

Imagine favoring an artist whose name was featured in graffiti scrawled on the urinals of Montmartre: "Matisse has done more harm in a year than an epidemic! Matisse causes insanity!" Yet the Cone sisters continued to collect his work, undeterred by public and private derision of his artistic vision.

Such independence of mind sometimes led the Cone sisters to overestimate other outsiders. Like her father, the Tennessee Jewish Confederate sympathizer, Claribel Cone rooted for the losing side in the First World War. During an annual shopping spree in Europe during the war, she was briefly trapped in Germany. But otherwise, the sisters enjoyed incredible freedom on their trips abroad. The European art scene was their personal shopping mall: The Cones filled their shopping bags with paintings and sculptures to decorate their Eutaw Place apartment back home.

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By the early 1920s, the sisters had broken free from the Steins' influence and begun selecting works on their own. But they never strayed far from the artists who had originally captivated them. They even continued to buy from the Stein collection when Gertrude and Leo needed money, but the sisters had come to occupy their own positions as art collectors.

The Steins do not come off so well in Gabriel's *The Art of Acquiring*. Gertrude sometimes seems little more than a cash- and fame-hungry dilettante willing to exploit loving friends for her own comfort. In Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, for example, she dismisses Etta as a "provincial simpleton"—shabby treatment of the woman who at one time helped type her manuscripts and was always available when Gertrude needed cash.

In reality, Etta was a shrewd individual who enjoyed life on her own terms. Her joys were few but deep: buying art, a Baltimore *pied-à-terre*, and the thrill of being known by the likes of Henri Matisse. Pretty good for a little-known spinster from Baltimore. Gabriel reports that when Etta told Matisse that she had "made him," he replied, that, no, he had "made her."

With no survivors, the Cones decided to leave their massive collection of 149 paintings, 97 drawings, 54 sculptures, 114 prints, and three illustrated books to the Baltimore Museum of Art. Claribel died in 1929, and by the time of Etta's death in 1949, the collection was estimated to be worth $3 million. Pinkerton guards were stationed outside the Cone apartments while assessors examined its pieces. The collection is valued today at half a billion dollars.

The story of the Cone sisters is, in its way, quite important. Before the National Endowment for the Arts, people like Claribel and Etta Cone collected great art, providing both cash and cachet to artists who desperately needed them.

Their story also proves that it doesn't take an avant-garde personality to appreciate the avant garde. ♦

GHOSTS IN THE MACHINE

The Computer as Hollywood Villain

By J. Bottum & Jonathan V. Last

The best way to wreck the art of movie-making is to think that movie-making is an art. Especially a high art, a deep art, a weighty allegory whose skewed camera angles symbolize the crooked timber of humanity and whose fractured story lines illustrate the incapacity of human reason to grasp the moral of the universe.

There are two movies playing in theaters this week—the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* and David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*—with the same basic device at their center: the paranoid notion that what appears to be real life is actually a computer simulation, a virtual reality into which we've all been plugged by some malevolent metaphysical force determined, like Descartes's evil genie, to deceive us.

It's always worth noting when two films appear at the same moment with the same theme. (There's even a third one, *The Thirteenth Floor*, due out on May 28; and the unreality of perceived reality was the theme of last year's *The Truman Show* as well.) But in this case what the movies mostly prove is the superiority of artlessness to artiness. Andy and Larry Wachowski, who wrote and directed *The Matrix*, have a lot of skill in their craft and only a few pretensions in their art, and the result is a sleek, entertaining movie. The Canadian director David Cronenberg is a paragon of pretension who's bent on conveying really deep thoughts, and as a result *eXistenZ* is an unwatchable and meaningless mess. Ugly, too.

The Wachowskis' *The Matrix* tells the story of a computer hacker named Neo, played by Keanu Reeves—whose slightly wooden acting makes him perfect for the role of a confused man forced awake from a comfortable delusion. Neo is living placidly enough in modern Chicago, until he's contacted one day by a mysterious man named "Morpheus" (the ancient Greek god of the morphing, shifting shapes of dreams; Henry James once complained that the heavy-handed Anthony Trollope was not gifted at the "science of naming," but Hollywood screenwriters make the names in a Trollope novel sound positively subtle).

Morpheus (played by Laurence Fishburne) explains to the befuddled Neo that the entire human race has been enslaved by something called "the Matrix," and he offers Neo a way out. Accepting, Neo finds himself thrown into reality—which turns out to be centuries later than the 1999 he thought he was living in.

There was a war, you see, between men and machines, and the machines won. And they've turned the human race into living batteries by hooking them up to the Matrix and harvesting their mental energy to fuel the machine world.

Morpheus and his small crew, however, have escaped the evil clutches of computers, and they enlist Neo in their attempt to destroy the Matrix from within and save humanity. The irony is that the real world is much less attractive than the dream one. Morpheus lives in a cramped, dingy ship eating gruel, while the people in the Matrix happily dine on steak and drive their Toyotas. But the Wachowski brothers rightly worry little about the existential questions this might raise: For them, there's only one good world, and that's the real one.

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Top: Warner Bros. Bottom: Dimension Pictures

Top: Keanu Reeves flies inside The Matrix. *Below: The closing scene of* eXistenZ.

The success of *The Matrix*—over $120 million in gross receipts so far—has come as a surprise to the movie industry, but it shouldn't have. The Wachowskis showed considerable promise with their debut film, the 1996 *Bound*, a taut and economical crime caper starring Joe Pantoliano, Gina Gershon, and Jennifer Tilly. And now they've demonstrated again that the best thing a director can do is find a lean, tight story and concentrate on the craft of filming it well.

With *eXistenZ*, however, David Cronenberg has made another kind of story altogether. This is the man who turned a campy Vincent Price horror movie from 1958 into the unbearable remake, *The Fly*, in 1986; the man who tried to film William Burroughs's unfilmable novel *Naked Lunch* in 1991; the man who put together one of the most pretentious movies ever made with *Crash* in 1996. In *eXistenZ*, he examines a time in the near future when video games have reached a frightening level of virtuality.

Players no longer sit at computers, but now have "bioports" surgically inserted into their spines so that they can plug into games that sedate them with total sensory immersion. Allegra Gellar (Jennifer Jason Leigh), the designer of the latest and most sophisticated game, "eXistenZ," becomes the target of a *fatwa* issued by members of a realist subculture that believes too much virtuality is dangerous.

They must be right, because everyone inside the game meets a grisly death. Cronenberg plays cinematic three-card monty with his audience, daring viewers to guess which reality is the game and which reality is real, all the while, trying to distract them with unnecessary and objectionable gore. But he really wants to play at metaphysics; even the film's last frame strikes an arch pose to ask—oh, so deeply—where the game ends and life begins.

The effect of *eXistenZ* is mostly boredom, because, well, this isn't what you might call a new idea. As in so much of popular deep thought nowadays, the sci-fi pulp fiction writer Philip K. Dick visited the notion back in the 1950s, predicting specifically that computer simulations would displace the real world.

And the general idea of nested levels of reality descends to Cronenberg by a hackneyed sequence that runs from horror flicks like *A Nightmare on Elm Street* through drug movies like *Altered States* and eventually, if one wants genuine metaphysics, back to the Allegory of the Cave in Plato's *Republic*.

But why the current obsession with the dark side of computers? Movies need big threats to the future of the human race for their heroes to fight against, and for the longest time directors had the atom bomb. Sometimes the Americans were to blame (*Dr. Strangelove*, *WarGames*), and sometimes the Russians were to blame (every James Bond movie up through *The Living Daylights*), but the moviegoer always knew exactly what the eschatological demon was.

Then one day, the Berlin Wall came down, and the threat of global thermonuclear destruction evaporated. And where can a poor director find these days a credible instrument of ultimate doom? So we've been treated in recent years to dinosaurs (*Jurassic Park*), plagues (*Outbreak*), and asteroids (*Deep Impact*, *Armageddon*). Now, with films from *The Truman Show* to *The Matrix* and *eXistenZ*, we're invited to fear that electronic simulation is making us lose touch with reality.

It's a little peculiar to be told this by a movie, when, after all, we go to movies to escape the real world for an hour or two. But a film with this as its central theme can still work, as long as it doesn't forget its first job is to entertain. *That* is the reality the artsy David Cronenberg has lost all touch with and the craftsy Wachowski brothers still seem to understand. ♦

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B&A

SCHOOL'S OUT

The Case for Competition

By Myron Lieberman

I've been reading books about education since 1948—book after book after book, in what seems now, fifty years on, to have been a never-ending stream. But I still have no hesitation in saying that Andrew J. Coulson's new study, *Market Education: The Unknown History*, is the most challenging book on the subject I've read. It's an international history of education, a critique of contemporary education, and a proposal for the future—all woven together in a very readable style.

ANDREW J. COULSON
Market Education
The Unknown History
Transaction, 471 pp., $25.95

MARSHALL J. BREGER and DAVID M. GORDIS, eds.
Vouchers for School Choice
Challenge or Opportunity?
An American Jewish Reappraisal
Wilstein Institute for Jewish Policy Studies, 201 pp., $14.95

Coulson's thesis is simple: An analysis of history demonstrates that education provided by open markets is consistently better than education funded and operated by government. This thesis holds as far back as the ancient Greeks. The open markets of Athenian education gave us Plato and Socrates, Sophocles and Aristophanes. The Spartans' governmental monopoly on education has left us, as Coulson remarks, with a nickname for football teams.

You can see the same pattern occur over and over again: in classical times, the middle ages, and the early modern era; in Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The fact that this outcome appears in so many different cultures in so many different eras is an exceedingly strong indication that the deficiencies of government-sponsored education cannot be overcome.

Coulson's analysis of contemporary education, especially charter schools and private scholarship programs for students from kindergarten to twelfth grade, is particularly insightful. *Market Education* is the first book to show why privately funded scholarships for these students in the United States today will result in better education than government-funded vouchers. He presents an imaginative but plausible scenario of how they might replace government funding as the dominant system for financing elementary and secondary education. But he is at his best in demolishing the arguments for the public school monopoly. Anyone who thinks that public schools foster harmony among the American people should read *Market Education*. The reader who isn't convinced is probably immune to evidence and logic on the issue.

The story of how *Market Education* came to be written is as astonishing as the book itself. Coulson is a graduate of McGill University, where he majored in mathematics. After working for Microsoft, he retired at the ripe old age of twenty-six, having earned enough to live comfortably and spend the next four years working on *Market Education*.

That's not to say that the book is perfect (even though the author does thank me in his introduction, when all I did was recommend it for publication). The weaknesses of *Market Education* result from Coulson's effort to squeeze too much into one book. Fortunately, this doesn't affect the main argument; in fact, the problems relate to matters that could simply have been deleted or shortened. The book, for instance, sets forth an extensive argument that public schools are failing—when this issue, which preoccupies a great deal of current discussions, is substantively irrelevant to the desirability of a market system of education. Henry Ford's Model-T was not a failure. On the contrary, it was a huge success, but it was the product of an industry in which improvement is essential to survival. Our schools are not such an industry, however, and the arguments over whether it is a "failure" do not matter as much as the attention given to them suggests.

Of course, such discussions have an important political dimension: Citizens who believe that our public schools are failing are more receptive to proposals for a different system. But there is a downside even to the political case for emphasizing it: Many Americans (especially older ones) remember their public schools with affection; labeling their schools "failures" can generate resistance as well as support for alternative systems of education.

Like most supporters of school choice, Coulson devotes too much attention to issues that would be settled by the system he advocates. His lengthy discussion of the best way to teach reading illustrates this point. Instead of showing why phonics is superior to the whole-language approach, Coulson would have been better served by emphasizing how such issues would be resolved under markets instead of bureaucrats. In his discussion of teacher training, he is critical of the fact that teachers take courses in the history and philosophy of education—an odd objection from a man who has just spent four years researching and writing on these topics.

One advantage of the careful work Coulson has done is that his *Market Education* cannot be characterized as the product of a zealous right-wing extremist. His case for a competitive education industry does not rest upon any particular denominational or political or cultural position. Instead, Coulson argues that a market system is the most effective way to achieve better educational outcomes at a lower cost. Such a system would greatly diminish the pervasive conflicts that result from efforts to impose majoritarian educational policies on widely diverse groups in our society.

A useful adjunct to *Market Education* is the new volume *Vouchers for School*

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Choice, a collection of thirty brief articles on school choice—ten devoted to the implications of vouchers for the Jewish community—edited by Marshall J. Breger and David M. Gordis. At present, there is overwhelming support for vouchers from the orthodox community and strong opposition from reform and conservative Jewry. As reform and conservative Jews become increasingly concerned over the loss of Jewish identity, however, they are beginning to reconsider vouchers as a way to reverse or at least halt assimilation. In the past, reform and conservative Jews were primarily interested in protecting Jewish pupils in public schools from the imposition of Christian practices such as school prayer, Bible reading, and nativity scenes that isolated or embarrassed Jewish students. Today, the desirability of maintaining Jewish identity is becoming a more persuasive consideration.

The articles in the book are uneven, but a few raise issues that are just beginning to affect the controversies over school choice. Perhaps the most important is the idea that treating denominational schools equally with nondenominational schools cannot, or should not, be construed as an unconstitutional establishment of religion. Indeed, if the government were to provide vouchers to nondenominational schools, wouldn't it be contrary to the First Amendment *not* to provide them to denominational schools as well? The implications of this argument are staggering. It turns the separation issue on its head by making the issue not whether it is permissible to provide government benefits to denominational schools, but whether it is permissible to exclude them from benefits.

Vouchers for School Choice is a helpful overview of the current education controversies in the American Jewish community. It does not, however, try to predict the near future of vouchers. On this issue, Andrew Coulson, who supports privately funded scholarships for children, may have hit the jackpot. On April 21, the Children's Scholarship Fund, an effort to provide four-year scholarships to children from poor families, announced that it had received 1.23 million applications from low-income families for the first 40,000 awards.

What's incredible about this is not the number of applications, but the fact that they're only partial. Applying families are required to pay $1,000 a year over a four-year period (though they can substitute in-kind services if necessary). In other words, 1.23 million families who can ill afford to pay anything at all are willing to pay for a service that is available at no cost from the public schools. The numbers we'll see once vouchers or tax credits or privately funded scholarships are made available to every family will prove, once and for all, that Americans are ready to embrace a market system of education. ♦

Bad Writing

Judith Butler Did It

By D.G. Myers

Bad academic writing is nothing new. Back in 1912, the critic Brander Matthews damned the scholarship of his day for its "endless quotations and endless citations and endless references," its shameless taste for "interminable controversy over minor questions," its careless assumption that every reader had an "acquaintance with the preceding stages of the discussion."

But though it still commits these faults more often than not, bad academic writing nowadays has become something worse than an aesthetic offense. Matthews may have been right to complain about his contemporaries' neglect of style. Academic writing in our own time, however, displays a disregard, not merely for style, but for truth. Once upon a time, no matter how badly they wrote, scholars imagined that they were contributing to knowledge. But no longer. Much of the scholarship in the humanities—primarily in English and comparative literature, but increasingly in history, musicology, art history, and theology—has no other purpose than to confirm the scholar's own status and authority. It is a contribution not to knowledge, but to political power.

Consider, for example, Judith Butler. Every year since 1994, the journal *Philosophy and Literature* has held a Bad Writing Contest, asking its readers to submit "the ugliest, most stylistically awful" sentences they've found. And this year's winning entry comes from Butler, a full professor at the University of California, Berkeley, and author of five books including the widely quoted *Gender Trouble* (1990).

Best known for her idea that gender is a performance rather than the expression of a prior reality, Butler is on practically everyone's short list of the most influential "theorists" now writing. She is routinely named in the company of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. Here is her award-winning sentence:

> The move from a structuralist account in which capital is understood to structure social relations in relatively homologous ways to a view of hegemony in which power relations are subject to repetition, convergence, and rearticulation brought the question of temporality into the thinking of structure, and marked a shift from a form of Althusserian theory that takes structural totalities as theoretical objects to one in which the insights into the contingent possibility of structure inaugurate a renewed conception of hegemony as bound up with the contingent sites and strategies of the rearticulation of power.

When *Philosophy and Literature* announced Butler's victory in December, the story was carried in over forty newspapers and magazines. The *New York Times*, *U.S. News and World Report*,

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ADVERTISEMENT

"Rudy's Vision"

Uncle Sam phoned Fiorello LaGuardia. "Mr. Mayor," he said, "I have some questions about Rudy Giuliani."

"Tell," Fiorello replied.

"How are his eyes, his vision?" Uncle Sam asked. "I have to know before I back him."

"Fair enough, Sam," the "Little Flower" responded. "What do I do?"

"Give Rudy an eye examination. Put up a screen. He stands back. You flash an image on the screen. Get Rudy's quick reaction. Send me the results," Uncle Sam directed.

So, Fiorello got Rudy. He told him about Uncle Sam. He said Sam asked him to handle the examination. Then, "O.K., Rudy stand back. Look at the screen. Tell me what you see. Ready? Here we go."

On the screen came Hillary Rodham Clinton. "What do you see, Rudy?" asked the former mayor.

"A commodities broker."

"O.K., Next, Reverend Al Sharpton?"

"Needs to go on my diet."

"Governor George Pataki of New York. See him on the screen. What do you see?"

"He's tall. A Yaleman. The first isn't his fault. The second is."

"O.K. Next on the screen. Tell me. Former Mayor David Dinkins of New York City."

"Tennis player. Love match. Happily married."

"There's Al Gore, Vice President, your vision."

"Stingy on charity. Bet his wife isn't a big Tipper."

"President Clinton, Rudy."
"He couldn't even tell George Washington the truth."

"O.K. Next, Reverend Jesse Jackson."

"We'd agree when you shake another's hand its not the color of it. It's the friendship in it."

"Next, Babe Ruth and the New York Yankees, what do you see?"

"Winslow Homer"

"Next, Rudy, the United States Senate. What do you see?"

"Hillary running against me. Being of Italian descent, I wouldn't put it pasta."

"New York's Board of Education and Public Schools. What do you see?"

"Call the schoolroom, the director's room. Let all the kids direct. Let them learn leadership. Just watch the change!"

"O.K. about Rudy Crew your embattled Schools Chancellor?"

"Like the Mutiny on the Bounty 'Crew.' Uprises Spencer Christian."

"O.K. Rudy there's the American flag. What's your reaction?"

"Help to make the sad days short and the long days happy."

"Thanks," said Uncle Sam to Fiorello LaGuardia a little later.

"What's your thinking on Rudy Giuliani now?"

"Well, if you ask me I like the scene Rudy always sees but not the scene poor Hillary has been made to see." He paused a second. Then said "Tell Rudy, I'm his Uncle Sam."

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the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, the *Economist*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Times Literary Supplement*, the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, and the *Wall Street Journal* all reported the contest, and National Public Radio broadcast a segment on it.

And then, in the February issue of the *New Republic*, Martha Nussbaum demolished Butler's pretensions as a thinker, calling her work sophistry rather than philosophy, a parody of original thought. Though trained as a philosopher at Yale, Butler is read and cited "more by people in literature than by philosophers," which raises the question of whether she "belongs to the philosophical tradition at all." In its chic and willful obscurity, Butler's writing is a "hip quietism," Nussbaum concluded, which "collaborates with evil."

This combination of popular press mockery and Nussbaum's reproof was too much, and Butler took to the op-ed pages of the *New York Times* on March 20 to defend herself. Scorning *Philosophy and Literature* as "a small, culturally conservative academic journal," she aligned herself with "scholars on the left" who focus on "sexuality, race, nationalism, and the workings of capitalism." Although she agreed that even leftist scholars "should be able to clarify how their work informs and illuminates everyday life," Butler insisted that academic writing needed to be "difficult and demanding" in order to "question common sense"—the truths so self-evident that no one thinks to question them—and thus "provoke new ways of looking at a familiar world."

If the choice is between the difficulty of the most advanced thought and the pseudo-clarity of popular prejudice, who wouldn't choose the former? But who said that's the only choice? In the limited range of options she offers us, Butler reveals much about the real politics behind bad academic writing.

The notion that difficult and demanding styles of writing are politically revolutionary—and that "plain" writing is hidebound and reactionary—is not just dubious, but tiresomely familiar. A variation on Ezra Pound's modernist credo "Make It New," it has been asserted by every pretender to artistic and philosophical originality this century. The desire to "question common sense" is merely the self-identification of someone whose "sense" is different, but no less "common." Although Butler wishes to disrupt "the workings of capitalism," the effect of her writing is exactly the opposite. Its effect is to safeguard the power and privilege of academic capitalists—among whom she is one of the great robber barons.

The ninety-word sample that won *Philosophy and Literature*'s Bad Writing Contest suggests as much. It is something more than the "ugly" and "stylistically awful sentence" demanded by the contest's rules. What Butler's writing actually expresses is simultaneously a contempt for her readers and an absolute dependence on their good opinion. The problem is not so much her lack of concern for clarity; it's her lack of concern for *clarification*. If Butler took seriously her academic responsibility—her duty to teach—she would take pains to make herself clear. Her concern, though, is not to clarify a difficult subject, but to justify her position in the front ranks. Hers is not writing to be read and understood; it is a display of verbal majesty, which is to inspire awe and respect. Its one purpose is to confirm Butler's authority as a leader of the academic left.

THE BAD WRITING CONTEST DOES IN FACT WHAT BUTLER AND HER ALLIES ONLY CLAIM TO DO: EXPOSE ENTRENCHED POWER.

At first blush, it seems remarkable that such writing finds *any* admirers. Warren Hedges, an English professor at Southern Oregon College, testifies that Butler is "one of the ten smartest people on the planet." But Hedges's admiration breaks down when forced to confront academic writing simply as writing. The third-prize winner in this year's Bad Writing Contest was from a recent book by the post-colonial scholar Homi K. Bhabha:

> If, for a while, the ruse of desire is calculable for the uses of discipline soon the repetition of guilt, justification, pseudo-scientific theories, superstition, spurious authorities, and classifications can be seen as the desperate effort to "normalize" formally the disturbance of a discourse of splitting that violates the rational, enlightened claims of its enunciatory modality.

Asked by the *Chicago Tribune* to parse and explain this sentence, Hedges admitted, "It doesn't make a lot of sense to me." Two years ago, *Newsweek* named Bhabha as one of its "One Hundred Creative Individuals Most Worth Watching." How is it possible that a writer bears watching, but his writing does not? The likely explanation is this: When such writing is separated from its purpose of confirming academic authority, it just doesn't make a lot of sense.

Academic writing wasn't supposed to be this way. Even at its most stylistically awkward, it was supposed to seek truth. Instead, what we have in academic writing nowadays is the circulation of authority—the replacement of the ideals of scholarship and academic community with the principle of a political party.

An instructive example of this assault on truth in the name of party occurred last year at a Yale symposium on psychoanalysis. Frederick Crews, Butler's colleague at Berkeley, read a paper in which he criticized the circularity of Freudian theory, which confirms itself by means of evidence manufactured by the very premises it seeks to confirm. Such reasoning, Crews said, is "a scandal for anyone who subscribes to community standards of rational and empirical inquiry."

By "community standards," Crews was invoking not an organic, social community, but rather the very principle of the university: an association of persons who are related to one another by virtue of their common pursuit of truth. During the discussion following his paper, however, Crews was willfully misunderstood by Butler. Pouncing on the phrase "community standards," she declared that it entails—as Crews summarized her position—"a tendency to fall in line with social 'normativity' in general, especially as it applies to the imposing of heterosex-

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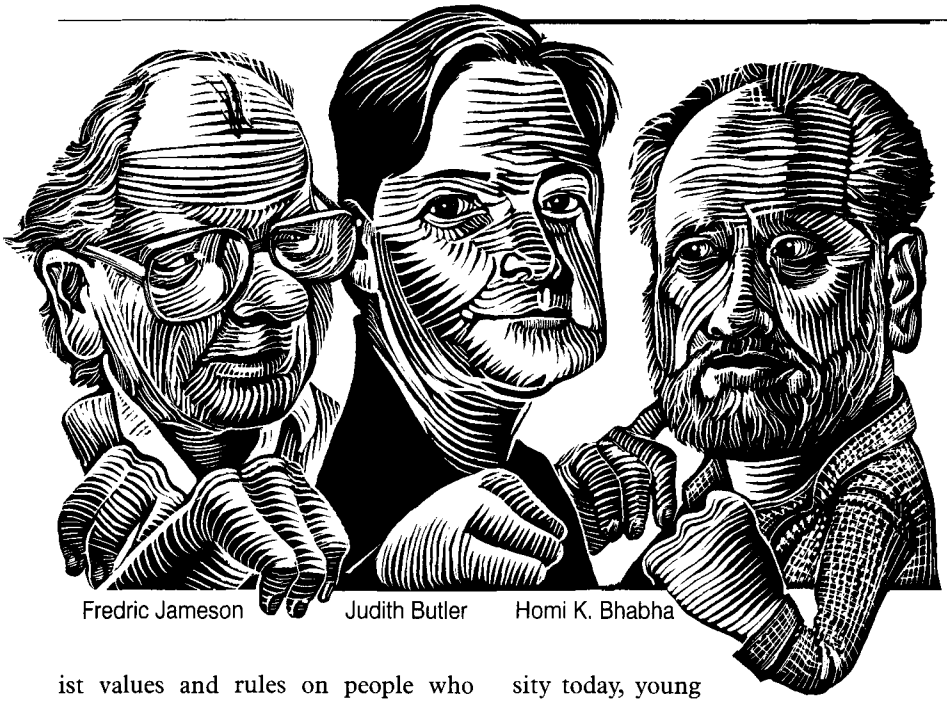

Fredric Jameson Judith Butler Homi K. Bhabha

ist values and rules on people who should be left in peace to pursue their own goals and pleasures."

There's a certain truth to the distinction Butler was making. It's the distinction between a *formal* community like a city, in which everyone obeys the same laws, and a *substantive* community like a baseball team, in which everyone pursues the same good. And Crews's understanding of scholarship is indeed a substantive one, implying a mode of association—the university—that exists to promote a common undertaking.

But the lie in Butler's response is the notion that she somehow advocates merely formal associations among university scholars. In summarizing her attack upon him, Crews put it neatly:

> What was very interesting . . . about my statement of ordinary rational principles—and the point was not lost on Butler's audible rooting section in our conference hall—was my self-alignment with social oppression. The hint was placed deftly and inconspicuously, but there it was: "community standards" meant homophobia.

In Butler's university, just as in Crews's, everyone pursues the same good. But in her community, the standard is not a common devotion to ordinary rational principles, but a devotion to the victory of a particular party.

We might call it the "liberationist party." What is required for membership is voluble solidarity with the party's claim to liberate us from "social oppression." To have any kind of career in the university today, young scholars must sit in this party's "audible rooting section," booing the likes of Crews and cheering the likes of Butler.

Over a century ago Matthew Arnold mocked this sort of call to party unity:

> Let us organize and combine a party to pursue truth and new thought, let us call it the liberal party, and let us all stick to each other, and back each other up. Let us have no nonsense about independent criticism, and intellectual delicacy, and the few and the many; . . . if one of us speaks well, applaud him; if one of us speaks ill, applaud him too; we are all in the same movement, we are all liberals, we are all in pursuit of truth.

You can catch some of the flavor of this party feeling in the attacks made on *Philosophy and Literature*'s Bad Writing Contest. In her *Times* op-ed, Butler observed that the contest winners, beginning with the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson in 1994 (he won again two years later), were "restricted to scholars on the left." Writing earlier in the on-line magazine *Salon*, Christopher Hitchens had made much the same point, suggesting that the contest betrayed a "certain easy populist hatred for the 'politically correct' Left, and a certain Anglo-Saxon and anti-intellectual contempt for the French." A professor from Germany went even farther, associating the contest with *Volkisch* anti-intellectual populism. The implication is obvious: To criticize the bad writing of "scholars on the left" is Fascist.

But you can feel the strength of Butler's party even more strongly among those who support the Bad Writing Contest. In the last two years, at least five young scholars have submitted entries, asking that their names not be released if they should win. In an unsigned June 1997 letter, one entrant confessed that he was "loath to upset senior scholars in my field," since alienating them could do "significant damage" to his career:

> I share this information not merely to expose the folly of current writing—there's enough bad writing going around that adding one more sentence won't really change much—but to let you know the terror under which many graduate students and junior faculty live. In the current crisis of hiring freezes and intense pressure for tenure, the need to publish is perhaps greater than any time before. Yet to publish in most journals means flinging the jargon, toeing the party line (which is somewhere to the left of gibberish), and quoting the usual suspects (Benjamin, Foucault, Derrida, Said, Jameson, Butler, *etc.*). I'm often appalled at my own writing, but since jargon, rather than substance, gains a publication, I succumb to verbiage where a simple sentence would do.

The problem, finally, is not that academic writing is "ugly" and "stylistically awful." It's rather that bad academic writing conceals the political reality of the contemporary university. No longer defined by the common attachment to ordinary rational principles, our universities have become institutions of one-party rule. To canvass for this party is to promote your career; to dissent from it is to put your career at risk. Young scholars must toe the party line in their writing—and pay a protection fee to the party bosses in the form of quoting them. And "to succumb to verbiage," is really to succumb to "the terror" under which many students and junior faculty live.

In such a climate, the party leaders are insulated from all criticism. *Philosophy and Literature*'s Bad Writing Contest does in fact what Butler and her allies claim (and fail) to do: It exposes the workings of entrenched power. It is one means—however minor and satirical—of discharging the old-fashioned academic obligation to correct error and reprove negligence; that is, to criticize bad work. ♦

Illustration by Kevin Chadwick

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Parody

"Pundettes in *Playboy*? Female conservative pundits are running scared from *Playboy* magazine, which is trying to do a story on the blonde, leggy stars of political chat shows." —*Roll Call*

PLAYMATE DATA SHEET

BUST: *25"* WAIST: *25"* HIPS: *25"* BIRTHDATE: *April 1, 1971*

HOME: *Washington, D.C. (until I run for "Senate"!)*

OCCUPATION: *hot, young political analyst*

AMBITIONS: *I plan to endeavor to pursue the opportunity of graduate studies. Plus I would like to run for Senator of California when I am old enough.*

TURN-ONS: *heavily armed Latin American human rights violators! Plus also a tax code that will unleash what is best of the American entrepenurial (sp?) spirit and lead to dynamic energy in the economy instead of the "overregulation" of big-government failed solutions of the past that haven't worked.*

TURNOFFS: *static analysis — expecially on "appropriations bills"! peaceniks! hard questions on "Crossfire"! food, books. "Mysoginists" who don't like women. Jealous people who refer to hot, young political analysts as pundettes.*

QUALITY MOST VALUED IN OTHERS: *an unfeinged (sp?) inability to distingiush between physical beauty and political expertise!*

IDEAL DATE: *Ted Stevens's politics, Ted Danson's looks, Ted Forstmann's bank account, Ted Kennedy's "wine cellar"!*

MOST INSPIRING EXPERIENCE: *Being told by President Clinton after "Crossfire" that there were no hard feelings about my tough questions and that he would leave the side door of the White House open for me if I ever wanted to discuss politics.*

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